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Allegiances

Grassclan

Leader: Whitestar- chocolate point (Siamese) she-cat with a plumed tail and blue eyes (*Apprentice: Gingerpaw*)

Deputy: Chicorynose- beautiful fawn she-cat with a plumed tail and pale green eyes

Medicine Cat: Snowfrost- silver lynx point she-cat with a plumed tail and blue eyes (*Apprentice: Goldenpaw*)

Code Keeper: Redwhisker- dark ginger and white tom with yellow-green eyes (*Apprentice: Dewpaw*)

Warriors:

Phesantstripe- handsome fawn tabby tom with green eyes

Sunstrike- ruddy ginger she-cat with yellow eyes

Peppertoe- dark tortoiseshell she-cat

Tigerfang- dark brown tabby tom* with amber eyes

Snailear- white tom with ginger patches and mix matched eyes (one blue and one green) (*Apprentice: Wasppaw*)

Slugsnout- ginger and white tom with amber eyes (*Apprentice: Beetlepaw*)

Ambereye- pale ginger she-cat with amber eyes

Sheeptail- white tom with odd curly fur and blue eyes. He is hard of hearing

Cricketsong- light brown tabby she-cat with yellow eyes

Cowpatch- white tom with brown patches and green eyes

Ryestep- greyish- brown tom with amber eyes

Cloverpetal- calico she-cat with yellow-green eyes

Ladybugbite- white she-cat with small ginger and black calico spots on her back mostly near the base of her tail and on her tail, a white tail-tip, and amber eyes

Butterflytail- handsome pale brown tabby tom with hazel green eyes (*Apprentice: Oatpaw*)

Bumblethroat- pale brown tom with black tabby stripes and amber eyes

Flashtail- yellow tabby tom with amber eyes (*Apprentice: Barleypaw*)

Gorseflower- badly scarred brown she-cat with pale green eyes

Rosebloom- albino spotted she-cat with pale blue eyes

Smokesnout- dull black tom with green eyes (*Apprentice: Wheatpaw*)

Tornface- white tom with a huge scar from the tip of his torn right ear to the bottom left of his chin

Apprentices:

Dewpaw- white she-cat with silver patches and blue eyes, code keeper apprentice

Gingerpaw- ruddy ginger tom with amber eyes

Wasppaw- dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Goldenpaw- pale golden and white she-cat with a white spot on the bridge of her nose and pale green eyes, medicine cat apprentice

Beetlepaw- ginger and white tom with extra ginger patches and yellow eyes

Barleypaw- pale yellow tom with amber eyes

Wheatpaw- pale tabby tom with yellow eyes

Oatpaw- yellow tabby she-cat* with amber eyes

Queens:

Den Mother: Posytail- lilac she-cat with a plumed tail and hazel eyes [mother of Phesantstripe's kits: Quailkit [light brown tabby mollykit with darker stripes] and Heatherkit [lilac mollykit])

Ashwhisker- dilute tortoiseshell tom* with yellow-green eyes (Father of Smokesnout's kits: Shadowkit [black tomkit], Shadekit [dark grey mollykit] and Starlingkit [dull black tomkit with darker black flecks])

Lilacbreeze- pale tabby she-cat with yellow eyes

Jaybird- silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Mallowlight- brown she-cat with green eyes (Mother of Sandclaw's [Oceanclan warrior] kits: Otterkit [brown mollykit] and Cinnamonkit [lilac mollykit])

Elders:

Boulderfall- dark brown tom with a grey muzzle and green eyes

Meadowcall- dark ginger she-cat with yellow-green eyes

Poppycloud- dark ginger she-cat with orange eyes

Cats outside the clan:

Wolfheart- handsome long haired grey and white tom with green eyes. Treeclan warrior

Brightsky- white and black patched she-cat with blue eyes. Treeclan queen

Misty- Silver-grey tabby she-cat with green eyes and a bumblebee collar. Lives in Twolegplace as a kittypet

Usagi- Purebred Japanese Bobtail; white and black she-cat with

blue eyes [mother of Hana, Aiko, Tama, and Yuki]. Lives in Twolegplace as a kittypet

Blazestar- ginger and white tom with orange eyes. Treeclan's leader

Mothsong- pretty calico she-cat with orange eyes. Treeclan's medicine cat

Hawkfern- long haired, mostly gray dilute tortoiseshell she-cat with orange eyes. Mountainclan's medicine cat

Curlear- hairless tom woth grayish-pink fuzz/skin, backwards curled ears, and yellow eyes. Oceanclan's head medicine cat

Bluesky- blue-gray tom with blue eyes. Oceanclan's apprentice medicine cat

Swanface- beautiful siamese she-cat with rich blue eyes. Marshclan's medicine cat

Chapter 1

"We can't keep them, Snowfrost," Wolfheart stressed firmly. "Even if we aren't together anymore I don't want anything happening to you. It's hard...but at least we'll know they'll be safe. The Twolegs will take care of them."

Wolfheart's words echoed in Snowfrost's mind as she stormed away from the Treeclan border, back to her own clan. Every hair on her body stood on end with fury. Her claws were unsheathed, gathering dirt and debris with every pawstep. The blood in her ears roared, blocking out every sound except for her own thoughts. If smoke could bellow out of her ears, it would. Though anger directed most of her actions, it was a small pang of sadness tugging at her heart which directed her pawsteps. If it hadn't been for the heartache, Snowfrost may have attacked her ex-mate. But she could never bring herself to do that, no matter how much he'd betray her. Deep down she still loved him. And in her heart of hearts she knew that he still loved her too.
The closer that Snowfrost drew to home, the more her anger began to melt away into sadness. As she passed by The Dip, the lynx point molly found herself unable to move any farther. She stopped abruptly, legs trembling. Her head drooped, and all of her pent up feelings came spilling out. Snowfrost sobbed harshly, clear glimmering tears slipping down her cheeks, dampening her fur. Her already unsheathed claws dug into the earth she stood on, trying to keep her grounded, trying so hard to stop herself from falling over into a crying heap in the dust. Her body felt heavy, as if a weight was pressing on her back. It was as if the whole world had suddenly come crashing down on her. Perhaps it had. Now she knew she had truly lost the love of her life forever, and her career was now in danger because of a stupid mistake. Not only that, but soon she would have kits to take care of. Everything that Snowfrost had ever wanted was being taken away from her. Her destiny, her love, all gone. Over some unborn kits. Maybe Wolfheart was right, maybe she should get rid of the kits. It would be whats best for her after all. But those kits were the last reminder that she had of Wolfheart's

love. How could she possibly give them up?
Calming down, Snowfrost decided that she would think about her circumstances more later. She forced herself to regain composure and move on, running the rest of the way back to camp.
Upon arrival she carefully slipped back into the medicine den, tiptoeing past Goldenpaw so as not to disturb her, and curled up in her own nest. Crying still, Snowfrost was stuck awake for much longer than she would have liked. Thoughts continued to fly through her mind like an angry flock of birds as she reflected on her situation, and what the future may hold. Fatigue finally took hold of her after a while, pulling her into a deep, restful slumber.

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The clatter of unfamiliar voices filled Snowfrost's ears as she opened her eyes, arriving in a giant familiar clearing surrounded by bushes and birch trees which towered higher than her line of sight. She was only a 'paw now, named three-quarter moons ago. This was Snowpaw's first gathering as a medicine cat apprentice, and excitement prickled across her pelt like a crackle of lighting. When Lightstar dismissed the patrol, she wasted no time weaving her way through the crowd. She wanted to meet every cats present, to introduce herself to all those in The Land's Star. 'My name is Snowpaw and I am going to go down in history!' Snowpaw became lost in her senses, unable to fully pay attention to where she was going. Something large and sturdy blocked her path as she walked, nearly knocking her over. Her attention immediately snapped back to reality. She let out a soft "oof" and she backed up to look up at what she'd hit, blinking as she got her senses right. Standing in front of her was a stocky grey and white tom. He was handsome, with long sleek fur and a large broad head. He was tall, not like a warrior, but he was big compared to her. The scent of sap and wood flooded her nostrils, giving away that the tom was from Treeclan. Pale green eyes locked onto Snowpaw, making the medicine cat apprentice feel small.

"Oh, I apologize," she meeped. "I did not realize anyone was in my path." The tom stared at her for a heartbeat before letting out a chuckle.

"Don't worry about it," he responded. "Just be more careful next time."

"I...I will," she promised. Snowpaw licked her chest fur nervously, glancing up at the stranger as she did so. The tom took a step forward,

giving her a sniff. Snowpaw stiffened.

"Is this your first gathering? I don't remember seeing you here before."

Snowpaw gave a nod, straightening herself up. She forced herself to lift her chin in order to appear more confident. She was a proud apprentice and was ready to show it. "Yes, it is. I was just made apprentice not long ago. My name is Snowpaw, of Grassclan."

"Snowpaw, huh? Nice to meet you. My name is Wolfpaw, and I'm from-"

"From Treeclan. I know. I can smell it on your fur." Snowpaw's pelt started to warm. Should she have blurted out the fact that she knew what clan he came from? It did show she was observant after all. But would he think it was weird?
W olfpaw blinked at her in surprise in response. He let out another chuckle, raising his tail in delight. Snowpaw's pelt grew hot at the gesture. This tom was so nice, much more charming and welcoming than she had expected. Were all cats from Treeclan this nice? Or was it Wolfpaw in particular? Snowpaw's heart raced as she thought about it, staring up at Wolfpaw without meaning to. She felt odd, being so in awe of this cat. Perhaps it was just her curiosity tempting her to learn more from the tom.

"You're a strange kit, aren't you?" Wolfpaw commented suddenly.

Snowpaw stepped back in surprise. "I beg your pardon? I am not a kit! I am almost a fully grown medicine cat." She turned her head, raising her nose into the air with closed eyes. She was young, sure, but she was practically fully grown. She was far more intelligent and mature than the other apprentices in her clan. She certainly wanted Wolfpaw to think so.

"Ooh my mistake," Wolfpaw meowed cheekily. "So you're a medicine cat apprentice?"
S nowpaw opened one eye to acknowledge him. She couldn't hold back the smile that began to twist her muzzle.

"I am. Softpetal says I am learning fast already. Perhaps I will receive my name earlier than most," she boasted proudly.

"Really? That's pretty neat. I'm a warrior apprentice myself. My mentor's

Blazefang."

"The deputy?" Snowpaw gasped, turning her head to face him again. Wolfpaw smirked.

"Yep. He says he's proud to have me as his apprentice. We both think I'm on the path to becoming a great hunting warrior some day. Though, I'm thinking about becoming a fighter too. I need to work on that a little harder, though."
S nowpaw let out a small snort, brining her head back down to adress Wolfpaw on a more equal level.

" I honestly cannot understand the appeal of such things. It's all so...violent. I find more joy in healing wounds than creating them."

W olfpaw nodded along as he listened to Snowpaw speak. He turned his head towards Split Rock for a moment before giving her his attention again.

"Hey, would you like to come sit with me by Split Rock when the gathering begins? We can chat a while more until then as well, if you'd enjoy that."
S nowpaw's eyes twinkled with excitement as she looked up at the taller cat, nodding her head with a smile.

"Yes...I'd like that very much, Wolfpaw."
Once again, Wolfpaw smirked. He stood, sweeping his tail around Snowpaw to guide her in the direction he wanted to head. Snowpaw followed him happily, delighted with the chance to get to know him better. She wondered what this might lead to some day. A bubble of excitement floated into her chest as she thought, making her pawsteps feel light and airy. Wherever this may head, Snowpaw was eager to find out.

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The next morning arrived too quickly for Snowfrost's liking. The light from the outside world shined in her eyes uncomfortably and unsettled her from her slumber. Stubbornly, Snowfrost picked up her wool nest and dragged it as far back into the den as possible before settling back into it. She tucked her nose under her tail and

closed her eyes as she began to drift back off to her dream land. But just as she was about to fall asleep again, Goldenpaw came bounding into the den, full of energy. Snowfrost tried her best to ignore the apprentice, but the young she-cat seemed persistent in getting her mentor up. Goldenpaw prodded at her side gently, purring a bit. Snowfrost whipped her head up from her nest to glare at her, blue eyes showing annoyance.

"What is it that you want, Goldenpaw?" she growled lowly. Goldenpaw shifted on her paws, a guilty look spreading across her face.

"I know you were sleeping, but...you said today we have to go on a huge herb picking expedition before the frost comes, and that you wanted me to remind you. It's already mid-morning, sooo I thought this would be a good time to head out."

Snowfrost narrowed her eyes at the pale golden she-cat. "Get a Collector to go with you to fetch the herbs we need," she grumbled, resting her chin on her paws. Goldenpaw gave her mentor a concerned look which only annoyed the older she-cat more. She rolled over to face the den wall, her back towards her apprentice. "I need to rest. You can handle it without me, they're just plants." Goldenpaw parted her jaws to speak, lifting a front leg to her chest before turning her head away, deciding to keep her thoughts to herself. She muttered a quiet "ok", turning tail and heading for the mouth of the den. She gave one more look back at her mentor before slipping out into the clearing.
Snowfrost sighed with relief, grateful for the peace. Goldenpaw was barely the right age to be named as a true medicine cat in any of the other clans, and was still a while away from being ready by Grassclan's standards. But Snowfrost barely had the patience for teaching an apprentice anymore. She knew that Goldenpaw was capable of handling things on her own, maybe she should give her her suffix and be done with it already. However this was a delicate decision that shouldn't be made irrationally or selfishly. Snowfrost made a mental note to think about it more later. For now, she felt like she could sleep for half a moon.
This occurred for several more days. Snowfrost felt constantly lethargic, barely leaving the den except to eat and use the dirtplace.

She would make Goldenpaw handle any issues cats would have, or preform any menial tasks that needed to be done. At first the apprentice had become discouraged by this, but Snowfrost made her start to think of it as a final assessment before receiving her medicine cat's name. After that, Goldenpaw didn't seem so reluctant to handle things on her own.
Finally the day of the half-moon arrived. Goldenpaw was clearly eager to get moving on the long journey to the Moon Cavern. She busted into the medicine den at sunhigh while Snowfrost was busy bathing. She beamed at her mentor, kneading the ground.

"It's time to get going," she announced, the enthusiasm in her voice obvious. Snowfrost rolled her eyes playfully and slowly rose to her paws, stretching back on her haunches before following her apprentice out of the den. She contemplated grabbing a bite to eat before going, finding her appetite quickly becoming ravenous over the past few days. She shook her head, clearing it of the thought. *Medicine cats cannot eat before a half-moon meeting*, she reminded herself. Goldenpaw bounced as they walked, giggling with excitement the whole way there. But Snowfrost had finally made the decision on whether tonight would be the night Goldenpaw would be named. Even though she was taking up pretty much all the responsibilities of a medicine cat now, she was still just a little too young. And there wasn't anything special about her healing abilities that would warrant an early naming ceremony. Snowfrost knew her apprentice would be disappointed by the news, but she allowed Goldenpaw to enjoy her excitement while it could last.
When they were halfway to the Moon Cavern, the other medicine cats of the Land's Star caught up with them. Goldenpaw excitedly proclaimed to the other unnamed apprentices, Bluepaw and Swanpaw, that she was receiving her name tonight. A twinge of regret pulled at Snowfrost's stomach. *Oh how disappointed you will be...*
And disappointed she was. Goldenpaw sat and watched as Swanpaw was given her medicine cat's suffix in silence, glancing at her mentor with sad green eyes. Her ears lowered slightly when Snowfrost didn't step forward to announce that she was doing the same. It wasn't the right time for Goldenpaw to become a full medicine cat, Snowfrost reassured herself. This was the right thing. *She still has much to learn.*

After the ceremony, the medicine cats padded over to brush themselves against the low hanging branches of the Star Willow. They all moved to curl up beside the tree's trunk, seperated into their clan pairs, but still together. Most of the apprentices laid with their mentors, while Goldenpaw went to lay closer to the newly named Swanface. She turned her back to her mentor, settling down to share tongues with Starclan. Pangs of conscience swept over Snowfrost as she found herself painfully lonesome in her spot by the sacred willow. Every other cat had at least one companion to lay with. Curlear with Bluepaw, Applefang with Mothsong, Batear with Hawkfern, and Brownstone with Swanface and Goldenpaw. Who was Snowfrost supposed to be with now? No one. Perhaps this was a sign, a sign that she was better off alone. Regardless, as she slept, the guilt of what she'd done never left her, not even for a hearbeat.

For the first time in almost a moon, Snowfrost was given the chance to walk in dreams with Starclan again. Too excited to care about anything else now, she ran across the starry field to speak with her old mentor, Softpetal, who was standing only a couple fox lengths away. But she ran too fast, and instead of crashing into the Starclan cat as she thought she would, Snowfrost completely phased through her. She turned around to apologize to her old friend, but no words managed to escape into the open. Confused, Snowfrost tried to grab her old mentor's attention. She tried to meow, but her noise was deafened. She waved a paw in front of the older cat's face, but Softpetal hardly even blinked. She even tried swatting her with her tail, like she did when waking her up as an apprentice. But nothing worked. It was as if Snowfrost wasn't even there at all. But someone else was.
Goldenpaw appeared before Softpetal and began to sob, her noise echoing in the empty space of the star laden meadow. She stepped forward and buried her nose into the Starclan cat's chest, her cries muffled by soft, silver spotted fur. The old she-cat nuzzled her and comforted her as she wept. Snowfrost suddenly felt rage wash over her. Why wasn't Softpetal able to see *her*
The unexpected sound of mewling below caught Snowfrost's attention, snapping her out of her rage. She glanced down at her paws to see four tiny stars-almost shaped like kittens- sitting in front of her. The starry shapes bounced and weaved around her legs for a moment before walking into her and disappearing. At the

same instance, a warmth pooled inside of her belly. Snowfrost sat down, brushing her tail over the area. It didn't take long for to realize why she was unable to talk with her Starclan friends now.

"It's so unfair!" A voice yowled abruptly. Snowfrost looked up to stare at Goldenpaw who was still crying to Softpetal.
"*I* was supposed to become a medicine cat tonight! Snowfrost promised!" she blubbered. Softpetal nodded slowly in understanding.

"Do not fret, child. You will be named very soon. But you are already Grassclan's true medicine cat, even as a 'paw. You need to keep your chin up."

"What do you mean..?" Goldenpaw sniffled, looking at the spotted she cat with wonder. Softpetal rested her chin on the top of her head.

"You will know soon enough."

Just as the words had been spoken, the starry scenery around them began to fade away into a flash of white. All of the medicine cats woke up shortly after, sitting up to briefly speak to one another. As they exited the Moon Cavern, they meowed their drowsy goodbyes before going their seperate ways for another half moon, heading back to their home clans.

Chapter 2

Journeying across the meadow, Snowfrost couldn't help but think about the dream. Softpetal's words still rang clear in her ears. *You are already Grassclan's true medicine cat*. She agreed with Goldenpaw's confusion, what was that supposed to mean? She knew the golden apprentice would make a good medicine cat one day, but she wasn't ready just yet. Or perhaps she was? Snowfrost knew she was unable to talk to Starclan now because of her kits. But had her ancestors already disowned her from the roll to the point where they were willing to recognize an *apprentice* as the new medicine cat? Maybe it was for the best. Though there wasn't anything special about her skills, Goldenpaw was still a good healer. She dedicated every heartbeat of her life to the job and to taking care of the clan. Snowfrost could never say the same about herself. But she knew that Grassclan would be in good paws one day when she was no longer with them. Which may come sooner than expected. For the past half moon, Snowfrost had been thinking about her situation and how she should handle it. After careful consideration she realized the only way that her kits would be safe would be to follow Wolfheart's advice. It was a painful choice to make, but the pain subsided slightly when she decided that wherever she would go, her kittens would stay with her. The only logical thing she could do was leave. It was clear that that must be Starclan's will as well. Snowfrost gave it some time before she planned to leave the Land's Star. She wanted the clan to get use to their new medicine cat, and get use to not having her around. As she bided her time, Snowfrost forced herself to socialize with the clan's apprentices to pick up a few new hunting and fighting techniques. It could be important later, in case she would need them on her journey to Twolegplace. Wheatpaw, Oatpaw, and Barleypaw were all too eager to flaunt their knowledge. They were young, and easy to goad into showing off. It was the perfect way to learn the skills required, while also avoiding suspicion from her clanmates. Though, Snowfrost noticed some of the older apprentices weren't as easy to mingle with as their younger denmates. Gingerpaw seemed disinterested in

showing off to anyone but his mentor, who happened to be Whitestar herself. While Wasppaw, Goldenpaw's brother, kept a distance from Snowfrost. He was probably just as bitter as his littermate was over Goldenpaw not gaining her name. The tom would purposely ignore the medicine cat in favor of giving his attention to a more "worthy" clanmate. *No matter, I still learn what I need from the younger bunch.*

By this point in time, the unborn lives inside of Snowfrost made their presence known. They'd wiggle roughly in protest whenever she'd overexert herself, or when she was hungry. She could feel them writher around whenever she was exhausted, as if willing her to sleep. She'd flinch every time they made a move, scared someone might notice her belly twitching like a half dead mouse and question her about it. If she could feel them moving, Snowfrost knew it wouldn't be long until cats began to notice how plump she was becoming. She was already beginning to get strange looks from the queens whenever they'd spot her outside by the fresh-kill pile, and comments from the apprentices that she smelled funny. She'd tried her best to make herself appear small, pressing herself close to the ground and hiding her belly behind her plumed tail. She tried to change her scent too, by rolling in lavander. It became clear to the lynx point molly that she could wait no longer. It was time to make the journey to her new home. Cautious, she made her way to the leader's den to alert Whitestar of her departure. With every pawstep she debated telling her clan leader the truth about why she was leaving, or creating a lie to protect her reputation. By the time she reached the mouth of the den she had made her choice.

"Whitestar?" She called, peering through the crack in Tall Stone. Inside the den she spotted the siamese she-cat laying in her nest. The clan leader beckoned the medicine cat inside with her tail, inviting her to sit.

"To what do I owe this visit, Snowfrost? Has Starclan spoken to you?" asked Whitestar calmly, wrapping her plumed tail around her paws neatly as she sat up.

"Yes they have, Whitestar," Snowfrost replied, lying through her teeth. "They say my connection to them is not as strong as it once was. That I have focused too much on my clanmates, rather than

looking to the stars. Omens have been overlooked, and signs missed. They are displeased. So I have been requested to go on a spiritual journey, in order to reconnect with our ancestors. Though I will be gone for...an indefinite amount of time. But I trust that my apprentice will make a fine replacement as medicine cat in my absence." The two she-cats sat in silence for a few heartbeats. Whitestar stared at the lynx point she-cat trying to take in the information she had just given her. Her light blue eyes seemed to see right into Snowfrost's heart, and for a moment she was afraid that her leader didn't believe her.

"Very well. If that is Starclan's will, then so be it. I will have a patrol escort you to the border and see you off on your journey when you are ready to depart." Whitestar replied with a wave of a front paw. Relief flooded through Snowfrost like water slipping through rock cracks. She stood up and bowed her head respectfully to the Grassclan leader before heading back to her own den. There, she made herself a package of traveling herbs, filled with the basics of burnet, chamomile, daisy leaf, and sorrel. She slathered some left over honey onto the bundle to make it easier to gulp down. She shivered as the herbs' bitter taste still managed to assault her taste buds. Her unborn kits seemed to writher too, making their mother force herself to keep the concoction down as they kicked at her flanks in protest. After another couple heartbeats struggling, they all relaxed. Snowfrost heaved a sigh and turned to press her nose to her side to reassure her unborn brood, before leaving the medicine den for the last time. When she stepped into the clearing, two she-cats approached her. The most easily recognisable for Snowfrost out of the pair was Jaybird, her sister. Next to her stood Ambereye, her mate.

"Whitestar asked us to walk you to the border," meowed the golden she-cat while Jaybird nodded in agreement. Snowfrost dipped her head to the two mollies gratefully.

"I'm ready."

Together the three she-cats made their way out of camp, down the hill, and across the meadow. The grass had begun to dull in color recently; wilted plants decorated the land, some still clinging to seed fluff and pods. A chilly breeze ruffled the she-cats' pelts,

stirring up leaves and debris around their paws as they pressed onward. The seasons were preparing to change, and already it was growing ever colder. By the look of things, there would be an early Leafbare this year. Snowfrost found it difficult to keep up with her clanmates the further out they walked. Jaybird seemed to take notice and fell behind to keep the same pace as her sister.

"I know you're going through something," she whispered, keeping her eyes ahead. Snowfrost felt her blood run cold.

"Is that so?" she asked calmly, trying to keep her voice from trembling. Jaybird glanced over at the lynx point molly, giving her a knowing look.

"I know my sister. And I have experience. It's not too hard to figure out what's been going on," Jaybird simply stated. "I just wish you would talk to me more. I could help you."

Snowfrost huffed, glancing away. Deep down she was nervous; any help she could get would be a blessing. But the lynx point molly couldn't bring herself to admit it.

"There is no way you could. I have made this mistake, and I must face the consequences. The only ones who can help now are Starclan," she meowed, sounding indignant without meaning to. Jaybird moved closer, leaning her shoulder against her sister's sympathetically. The warmth from her body was so comforting. Snowfrost briefly reminisced about her kithood; how close they used to be. Everything changed when Snowfrost was made the medicine cat's apprentice. She had all but forgotten about her silver tabby littermate throughout her training, and yet Jaybird still cared for her as if they had been inseparable for seasons. Sadness twisted her heart and Snowfrost felt her kits quiver with empathy. The moment of thought was broken suddenly by Ambereye trying to make conversation.

"Hey if you see any rouge toms lookin to help a molly out, or any rouge queens on your way home, could you scoop up a kit or two for us? Jaybird and I want to raise another litter." Snowfrost twitched her whiskers in annoyance.

"I'll see what I can do," she responded flatly, trying to keep herself from growling. Ambereye was a good cat and a great warrior, but not one of the lynx point she-cat's favorite clanmates.
Snowfrost felt her kits trembling inside her as she stood on the border with her escorts. *Calm down my little ones, we are going someplace where we will be safe. Don't be scared*. She glanced back at Ambereye then turned to Jaybird. She tucked her head under the silver tabby she-cat's chin, nuzzling her.

"I'll miss you," Jaybird whispered. She purred sadly, licking Snowfrost's ears. "I will always be here for you, Snow. If you come back I'll do whatever I can to help. For now...just take care of yourself."

"I will." Snowfrost pulled back to stare at her sister, ice blue eyes meeting darker blue. She waved a last goodbye with her tail as she turned and began to pad off alone, away from the border and into unclaimed territory. *But I'm not alone*, she reminded herself with a soft smile.

"May the winds be on your side!" the mates caterwauled to Snowfrost right before she disappeared from sight.

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Snowfrost wanted to run and get to Twolegplace before it grew dark, but with her belly so heavy with kits she could do no such thing. She padded the rest of the way across half grassy, half forested area. The long shadows casted by the trees as the sun began to set made Snowfrost feel uneasy. This place was completely unfamiliar to her, and though she knew Twolegplace wasn't too far, she knew she couldn't go on any longer today.
Instead, she decided to catch something to eat and then find shelter for the night. She kept walking, tasting the air for scents of prey. Nearby she caught two tempting smells, one of squirrel and one of rabbit. She knew there was no way she'd ever be able to catch a rabbit on her own, and the squirrel was closer anyways. The pregnant molly dropped into a crouch, slowly approaching the fuzzy grey-brown creature. In a flash she lunged forward in a hot pursuit of her target. She managed to pounce on the squirrel then grabbed it by the neck, snapping it between her teeth. Satisfied, she

dragged her fresh-kill with her to a nearby tree. The tree's roots were slightly uplifted, creating a perfect little den underneath fit for one. She squeezed herself inside, dragging the squirrel in with her. She delicately tore at its fur with her teeth and claws, placing it around her belly to help keep herself and her unborn kits warm. With her prey all bare, she dug into its meaty flesh. Squirrel was a rare treat; this catch would have been one to be praised back home. But Snowfrost knew that Grassclan wasn't home anymore, Twolegplace was.

Chapter 3

Dawn approached quickly, much to Snowfrost's relief. Sleeping alone in an unfamiliar place even made living with Twolegs seem more inviting. It didn't help that she wasn't able to get much rest either, with no proper nest to sleep in and her kits kicking her belly all night long out of what she could only presume was anxiousness. Snowfrost was all but overjoyed to abandon her temporary den and finish her journey to Twolegplace. The sun shined down upon her back as she made her way towards the towering dens, warming her. It was a bit intimidating, knowing that one of the dens would be her new home. How would she know which to try and make her way into? Snowfrost caught the familiar scent of cat on the wind, what she could only assume to be the scent of kittypets. Perhaps trying a den which already housed a kittypet would be the most ideal place of living. After all, if a Twoleg was willing to keep one cat already, what's a couple more? Not to mention it would be nice to have a friend. The pregnant molly looked up at a fence post which seemed wide enough to hold her, even at her ever growing plump size. She crouched down and made a hesitant jump, landing on the post in a clumsy manner. From this height she was able to see into the windows of a few dens stretching up and down the row. In one window, just three dens down to the left, she spotted the silhouette of a cat sitting on an indoor ledge, basking in the sun's morning rays. Snowfrost walked across the fences to the yard that connected to that den and hopped down. She remained crouched in the grass, feeling cautious. She looked around for a moment before rising to her paws. She knew the only way she was going to get inside was to get the Twolegs attention. The lynx point molly began to meow, walking up to the door of the den and scratching on it with her claws. She made sure to make her cries sound pitiful and half starved-as a few of her friends from Oceanclan had taught her to do. Soon enough, her cries were answered. A tall Twoleg with long fur on top of its head peered down at Snowfrost from the doorway. She looked up at it with round, sad eyes. Snowfrost rolled onto her belly, revealing her pregnancy in hopes that the Twoleg would take pity on her. The tall creature let out an "aww" noise and

bent down. Gently it reached for her belly, and though Snowfrost was nervous, she let it touch her there anyways. Its large paw felt strangely warm against her round belly, and her kits seemed to wiggle in response. The Twoleg reached down a second paw and scooped Snowfrost up, carrying her inside. It lumbered around deep inside of the den, carefully setting down the plump molly onto a weird, yet soft surface before walking away. The area Snowfrost was now laying on was a large, bush shaped thing which felt soft and cushy like a nest. Surprisingly, it was comfortable. Snowfrost found herself being able to easily relax. She rested her chin on her paws and closed her eyes, taking a short nap. When she woke up, a cat was sitting on the ground beneath the bush-nest thing, staring up at her.

"Hello," the cat greeted, jumping up to sit beside her new denmate. She gave Snowfrost a little sniff. "Did you enjoy your little nap?"

"Greetings." Snowfrost yawned, sprawling herself out to make herself and her kits more comfortable. "I did, actually. Thank you. I hope I'm not intruding."

The other cat purred. "Not at all! I can see you could use all the comfort you can get right now. There's plenty of room on the couch for both of us anyways." She laid down on the couch next to Snowfrost, cleaning one of her front paws.
"My name's Misty by the way. What's yours?"

"My name is Snowfrost. Though, I'm sure your Twoleg will call me by something else soon." Misty looked at Snowfrost oddly, most likely because of the unfamiliar vocabulary she was using.

"That's a strange name. Where'd you come from?"

"I come from Grassclan. It's a clan that claims the meadow as it's territory," Snowfrost answered simply. Misty bobbed her head, cleaning her chest fur.

"Ah, so that's why you smell like dew and wildflowers. That's pretty neat, that you're a wild cat. Or were. I'm sure you'll find being a house cat far more rewarding though."

"Oh yes, I'm sure I will," Snowfrost responded, her tone laced with sarcasm. She rolled her eyes. Misty didn't seem to notice or care, she was too busy grooming herself. Snowfrost took the opportunity to study her new kittypet companion while she was distracted. The she-cat was youthful looking; possibly around Snowfrost's age. Her fur was a silky medium length; a dark silver-grey color with faded black stripes swirling around her flanks and striking her forehead. A long, feathery tail completed her coat. Her eyes were round, tinted an odd greenish-blue color, bright and full of youth. Around her neck she wore a yellow collar with little bumble bees printed on it, and shiny metal tags hung from the ring attached to the front of it. Overall she looked well taken care of, and Snowfrost silently praised herself for choosing the perfect den to move into.

"Hey, I wouldn't get too comfortable if I were you," Misty deadpanned as she smoothed down the fur on her shoulder. Snowfrost twitched her whiskers.

"Why not?"

"I hear my housefolk setting up the cat carrier. Looks like you're taking a trip to the vet," the young she-cat replied, flicking and ear in the direction of a strange crackling noise. A moment passed and sure enough the Twoleg walked into the area, carrying a strange grey box. At the sight, Misty jumped off the couch and darted away to an unknown location. Snowfrost didn't know what was going on, or have the energy to run away. She allowed the Twoleg to pick her up with ease. It handled her delicately, placing her inside the box on top of a fluffy surface which she could only assume was some kind of super soft pelt that was used for bedding. Snowfrost snuggled into it, the fur pelt warming her belly and settling her restless unborn children. She looked out at the view beyond the bars of the cage with curiosity. Her heart dropped when she noticed she was being carried outside and towards a monster. *Is the Twoleg going to feed me to it?!* she screamed internationally, beginning to panic. The pregnant she-cat moved to the cage's back wall, cowering there. She began to wail, begging to be set free. *I don't want this! I thought the Twoleg would take care of us!*
The Twoleg opened up the monster's flank, placing Snowfrost's cage inside. She continued to wail, praying silently that Starclan would

save her and her kits. The time she was kept in the cage inside the monster wasn't that long at all, and before she knew it the Twoleg was back to carry the cage again. It took her away, into a strange den. A powerful smell of fear smacked Snowfrost in the face as soon as they entered, almost choking her. Another assortment of scents mingled with it, that of cat and dog. Anxiety drove Snowfrost to fall silent; she didn't want to draw attention to herself. She parted her jaws, panting, trying to calm down. From the view of her cage she could see a couple of dogs laying on the floor beside their Twolegs. They whimpered, tails quivering with fear. A few cages also sat in the room with Twolegs, the scent of cat emanating from them. Time seemed to stand still. It was hard to tell how long the cage remained stationary before it was lifted again, carried into a strange area. Blinding white light filled the lynx point she-cat's vision, disorienting her as the cage was opened. She was dragged out by the long, lanky paws of her Twoleg, placed onto a cold metal surface. She trembled as she stared up at the face of a new Twoleg with loose white fur along its arms. Its paws were covered in a strange white film which made a snap sound when plucked at the edges by the Twoleg's dull claws. Snowfrost's eyes grew wide as she realized what kind of Twoleg it was. This was the Cutter. The strange creature wrapped Its paws around her, flipping her onto her back. It shined a light into her eyes then massaged her belly for a moment. Her kits kicked wildly in protest, trembling inside her.

"Don't hurt them!" She pleaded. The Cutter held something strange up to her for a few heartbeats then left for a while. Snowfrost was placed back in the cage soon after. When the Cutter returned she watched the two creatures communicate from the safety of her pelt lined cage, unable to calm herself. The Cutter placed something over a light on the wall which revealed an image of something that resembled bones on a blackish-blue background. It pointed to the image, and the more familiar Twoleg nodded, muttering something incomprehensible. Snowfrost wondered what was going on and let out a small sigh, resting her chin on her paws. Suddenly a realization occurred to her. Her kits had stopped moving. She began to panic again. Had all the jostling harmed her kits? The lynx point molly pressed her nose into her side, feeling for signs of life. Relief washed over her as she felt a tiny foot kick her flank. A sensation of lightheadedness overcame her and Snowfrost decided to try and

sleep while she could.

When she woke up, she was back in the Twoleg's den. Her Twoleg released her from the cage, leaving her on the couch where it had originally found her before the whole "vet" ordeal. Not long after, Misty came bounding up to her.

"Hey there, Snowfrost! How'd it go?" she asked nonchalantly, jumping onto the arm of the couch to peer down at the older molly.

"It was terrifying!" Snowfrost shook out her pelt as if to rid herself of her fear. Misty chuckled.

"Yeah, the vet is a pretty scary thing to encounter. Did it poke you with anything sharp?"
Snowfrost shook her head, tucking her paws under herself with some difficulty.
"Huh. Lucky furball. Usually that's what happens when you go there. Maybe they didn't poke you because of your kittens. Either way, be glad that it's over. I'm going to let you rest. I'll show you around later when you're up for it." Misty jumped down from the couch, padding away to another part of the den. Now that she felt safe and comfortable, Snowfrost closed her eyes, falling back to sleep. She was woken up later on by her growling stomach. Nausea churned inside her, driving her to get up and look for food. She knew there'd be no way to hunt right now if she made it outside so she'd reluctantly have to choke down whatever pellets or slop that she would be fed. Snowfrost made her way to the floor, looking for the area where the Twoleg would feed them. As she searched, a tantilizing, meaty smell filled her nostrils. The scent made her mouth water and her stomach growl louder. Her kits kicked inside her as if begging their mother to find food. Not knowing her way around, she decided to find her silver furred denmate and ask for directions. A couple foxlengths away she found Misty batting at a fake mouse, tossing it into the air like a kit playing mossball. Snowfrost cleared her throat to catch the younger molly's attention.

"Do you know what that smell is?" she asked. Misty gave the air a sniff and licked her lips, beaming.

"Yeah, dinner!" She beckoned the lynx point molly with her tail,

walking off into another area of the den. Snowfrost followed closely behind. This part of the den had a strange floor. Rather than fake grey grass, it was covered in a reflective surface which resembled a frozen pond. Misty walked easily across it as if it were nothing, and Snowfrost followed suit. She sat a few tail lengths away while Misty pestered the Twoleg, circling around Its legs, begging to be fed. The Twoleg turned, holding something out which held the source of the delicious prey smell. It trudged over to where Snowfrost sat, placing the food down. Whatever it was, it didn't look like any sort of prey the pregnant molly had seen before, but she didn't care. Without hesitation, Snowfrost dug into the food, despite the thick cloud of steam rising from the flesh. She trilled, delighted to find out that the food was in fact real fresh, hot meat. It wasn't half bad either, not comparable to rabbit of course, but it was far from disgusting. Misty padded over to join Snowfrost in the feast.

"How do you like it?" she asked.

"It's delicious. It tastes kind of like black bird." Snowfrost swallowed a large chunk, taking another bite. "What is it?"

"It's chicken," Misty replied. Snowfrost recalled the animal; it was a type of bird which grew as large as an apprentice, and as fat as a kittypet. She remembered seeing them regularly on the farm on Grassclan territory. The clan was forbidden from hunting them to deter the farmer from believing cats to be pests. Now that she knew what it tasted like, she thought about what a shame it was that her clan couldn't try it themselves. There was always an abundance of chickens on the farm even in Leafbare, enough to support the whole clan with plenty to spare. Snowfrost wondered if the farmer would really be able to notice if a few went missing. She made a mental note to tell the clan about this discovery if she were to ever return home. It didn't take long for the two she-cats to finish off their meaty feast. With bellies full, Misty showed Snowfrost one of the most comfortable places for lounging and invited her to lay awhile. Not wanting to turn away such a generous offer, she did. She groomed herself a while, glanced around at her surroundings after, then eventually began to doze off again.

Chapter 4

Snowfrost found herself rudely awoken the next morning. Something round and furry had hit her in the muzzle, startling her out of her dreams. In the nest in front of her lay Misty's fake mouse, and a tail-length away stood Misty. There was a guilty look upon her face, although the kittypet forced herself to smile and chuckle.

"Sorry, Snowfrost," she mewed, lowering her ears. Snowfrost rolled her eyes, picking up the toy with a claw and tossed it back to her denmate. After, she sat upright in her resting place.

"You are forgiven. Just don't play near me while I am sleeping again," she responded as she began to wash her face, sounding colder than she'd meant. Misty muttered another soft apology, picking up her toy to play with elsewhere. Snowfrost took this time alone to properly wash herself, checking on the kits in her belly when she finished. Seeing everything was now in order, Snowfrost stood. After giving a good stretch, she padded off to have a bite to eat. She was pleasantly suprised to find more food in place of where last night's meal had been. It was cold this time, but Snowfrost wasn't about to be picky. She gobbled up a huge portion of the chicken, cleaning off her whiskers, before walking off to explore her new territory. Many strange objects towered before her, some brightly colored, others made out of wood. Snowfrost wondered what some of these things were. Along her walk, Snowfrost spotted Misty playing alone in a corner. She was tangled up in a pink colored vine, rolling and tussling about, though she didn't seem to be trapped or in distress. In fact the giggles that rose from where she played told otherwise. *Kittypets are amused by the simplest of things*.

"Misty?" She called as she stopped in front of her denmate. Misty glanced up at her from her place on the floor. In this moment she was upside down, rear propped up by the wall behind her. Part of the vine was trapped between her teeth, as if she were feigning a killing blow to a piece of prey. She almost appeared kit-like this

way.

"Is there any way you could give me a tour? Perhaps teach me about all these sorts of Twoleg items that are laying about everywhere?"

Misty let out another giggle, flipping over and dropping her toy. "Oh yes, I'd loved to!" She swished her tail invitingly, prompting Snowfrost to follow.
"Let me show you what's in this part of the den first. Different areas in housefolk dens are called 'rooms' and this one is called the livingroom," she began. "You already know the couch, which is a main attraction here. And with it usually goes the magic vision box."
Snowfrost followed her companion like a curious kit, learning everything she could about her new surroundings. Her ears were trained on the other molly's voice, clinging to her every word. If Snowfrost was going to stay in a place like this, she realized she'd have to know what sorts of objects she would be dealing with. After all, she needed to make sure things were safe for her kits.

As they padded from room to room, Misty taught Snowfrost the names of things that she knew in Twoleg Speech. Things such as table, kitchen, yard, house. And for whatever she didn't know the proper name of, Misty taught her the language kittypets used. For instance, Twolegs were called "housefolk", which Snowfrost found odd, but supposed it made sense.

By the time the tour was over, Snowfrost's head was reeling. She felt as if she was an apprentice again, exploring the territory for the first time; yet she'd walked barely a flea-length of the distance and was just as tired. When the two she-cat's returned to the living room, Snowfrost felt drained. She jumped up onto the couch and settled herself down, soothing her restless brood of unborn kits in the process. Misty leaped up after her, turning in place to groom the base of her tail.

"So how do you like the house?" She asked.

"I suppose it's nice, for a Twoleg's den. It seems safe enough. I'm sure I will settle in just fine."

"That's good to hear. I think your kits will like it too. We'll have lots of fun around here. Oh, and just wait until we explore outside the house tomorrow!"

Tomorrow? Snowfrost hadn't realized the Twoleg would even consider letting them outside.

"We just have to wait until you get your collar. I heard our housefolk mention the word earlier. I think it's what she left the house to do."

Snowfrost grimaced. A collar? Surely she did not need such an obvious mark of ownership, right?

"What is the point of me wearing one? I am no one's belonging. I am already bound to this place because of my kits, is that not enough?"

Misty turned, blinking at the other molly. "Oh it's not about that! It's in case we ever wander too far, or get lost. It's so other housefolk know where we belong, and so they can bring us home."
Snowfrost could only muster a disgruntled huff, still not keen on having to have something hung around her neck. As she adjusted herself and rested her head on her paws, the front door of the house creeked open, allowing their housefolk to come inside. The lumbering creature padded its way over to the couch where its two willing captives lay. Misty stood up with a welcoming trill, receiving a pat on the head. Snowfrost growled as the Twoleg attempted to do the same with her. Despite her warning growls, the seemingly daft beast scooped Snowfrost up. It placed the pregnant she-cat onto its lap, running its paw along her back. It seemed that it was trying to soothe her. Though she was still on edge, Snowfrost allowed her guard to drop a little. She wouldn't get anywhere if she didn't try to get along with her new housefolk. And the creature was being gentle enough. Snowfrost was a reasonable cat, she could level with this Twoleg as long as it didn't try anything funny. So she inevitably allowed it to pet her. And soon, she allowed it to claim her.
From it's pelt, the Twoleg pulled out a brand new collar, opening it and fastening it around Snowfrost's neck. It was uncomfortable, but it gave her plenty of room to breathe. With a glance, Snowfrost

could tell the patterning laced against the strange material. The main collar was blue with white snowflakes along it. In the front there was a heart shaped tag, and a little white bell which made an oddly pleasant sound when she moved. It would take some getting used to, much like everything else, but Snowfrost would adapt quickly. With its business taken care of, the Twoleg allowed Snowfrost to go free. Snowfrost happily hopped off the creature's lap, padding across the floor to find a more quiet place to sleep. *The couch is too busy of an area. I'll have to find somewhere else to nest for the evening.* Using the knowledge she obtained during Misty's tour, Snowfrost wandered into another part of the house. There she found a cave known as a "closet" which seemed dark and comfortable enough to sleep in. Snowfrost felt a kick in her stomach from her kits, urging her to go inside. The molly didn't argue, pushing her way inside the small space. Snowfrost turned in place upon a soft Twoleg pelt and laid herself down. She gave herself a good wash and finally let sleep welcome her.

Chapter 5

Hours had passed. How many exactly, Snowfrost was not sure. However long it might have been was enough to make Misty worry.

"Snowflake? Hey Snowflake, where are you?" She called. Snowfrost lifted her head to respond but hesitated a heartbeat. Was Misty talking to *her*? Or was there another cat in the house? Regardless, Snowfrost decided to answer the other cat's calls and come out of the closet.

"Are you addressing me?" She asked as she came to stand before her housemate.

Misty instantly brightened at the sight of Snowfrost. Her tail raised high and quivered in greetings.
"Of course! Who else would I be talking to?" She giggled.

"You are aware that my name is Snowfrost and not Snowflake, correct?" Inquired the pregnant molly, flicking her ear.

"Well, Snowflake is the name our housefolk is calling you by. So I thought I should call you that too."

So she had been given a kittypet name? Snowfrost resisted the urge to grimace in response. First she received a collar of ownership, and now a name change. Pretty soon, she wouldn't even be a clan cat anymore. Though she'd known it was inevitable for her name to change, she still wasn't happy. *No*, Snowfrost growled internally. *Starclan chose my name. Even though they no longer speak to me, I can't disrespect them by changing it. I am Snowfrost. I always will be.* Snowfrost took an extra heartbeat to gain her composure before speaking again.

"I appreciate you trying to help me adapt to this new life. But if it's all the same to you, I will remain as I am. Please don't refer to me as 'Snowflake'," she requested.

"Are you sure? Snowflake sounds just as pretty as Snowfrost," Misty tried to persuade, as naive as a kit to the ways of clan culture.

"I'm quite sure. My name holds special meaning. Changing it would be blasphemy. And a scratch in the face of my mentor who gave it to me."

Misty gave Snowfrost a strange look before licking down her chest fur. "Well alright. But I doubt the other housecats will be as easily convinced."

"And why would they need convincing?"

"Well, some of the housecats can read Twoleg language. They'll see that your collar says 'Snowflake', and won't call you anything else." Ah. So kittypets were as stubborn as Snowfrost had heard. They must be the sort to hear an idea and latch to it like a kitten to its mother's teet. Still, if those pampered Twolegs' toys could be adamant, then so could she.

"Then I will just have to persuade them, won't I?"

Misty shook her head doubtfully before flicking her tail. She beckoned Snowfrost to follow her across the house to what the kittypet referred to as "the back door". There, Misty let out a loud chorus of meows, attracting the attention of their housefolk. The giant creature stomped its way over, bending down to pet each cat. Then it stood upright and pryed open the door. Misty trilled out a thank you, scampering out the open entryway with eagerness. Snowfrost followed behind at a more leisurely pace. She wasn't too keen on meeting the new neighbors. But she was thrilled to be outside again. How long had it been since she'd felt fresh air on her whiskers? At least two or three days. Maybe an eon. Being pregnant made time feel so chaotic. But the sight of the bright sun and cloudless sky helped Snowfrost gain back some sense of it. Though she wouldn't know for sure until she saw the moon. *I must keep track of time. I have to monitor how far along I am becoming.*
Snowfrost was pulled from her thoughts as Misty yelled out to her from across the yard. Snowfrost quickened her pace a little to a trot. She settled in front of her companion who stood beside a bush.

"Hey you're a wild cat, do you know anything about these berries?" Snowfrost took another pawstep forward to take a sniff of them.

"It's juniper," she answered surely, "they're for soothing bellyache."

"Really?" Misty seemed amazed by Snowfrost's very simple knowledge. "How do you know that?"

Snowfrost raised her chin a little pridefully. "I'm a medicine cat. It's my job to know. I studied herbs like this for ten moons as a young cat. And I have been my clan's sole healer for the past two years. Up until now, I suppose."

Misty stared at her companion, eyes sparkling with intrigue. A wide smile spread across her muzzle. "Wow that's pretty neat! Maybe you could teach me about plants and stuff sometime? And if you do, then I can help take care of you when it's time for your kits to come."
That actually didn't sound like too bad of an idea. Though in some way it made Snowfrost feel unsure. She'd failed to complete her first apprentice's training by abandoning her still as a 'paw. And Misty wasn't even a clan cat, muchless a medicine cat apprentice. Still, it could be beneficial for both of them if the other cat learned about herbs. It wasn't wrong to teach a cat how to heal.

"I'll think about it," Snowfrost decided. Misty seemed satisfied by that response, and dropped the subject for now.
The grey tabby kittypet beckoned with her tail once more, leading the way to the fence which marked the end of their territory. Misty, showing herself to be clever, walked through a large gap between the white posts. Snowfrost followed cautiously behind, afraid to get her belly caught or scraped against the unnaturally colored wood. Safely through, the two she-cats made their way to some of the neatby houses. In some of the yards, kittypets lounged in the sun, and played with things in their gardens. Most cats seemed excited when Misty came into their yards. Misty acted just the same, enthusiastically introducing her friends to her new housemate. Snowfrost felt a little overwhelmed by all the new smells and sights and cats she was exposed to. So many strange names to memorize. Sparkles, Oreo, Prince, Felix, Bella, Pickles, Luna, Rocky, Angel. Misty was certainly popular. And her friends certainly were

annoying. Half of them seemed dumber than a mouse. While others were far too nosy, reading the name from Snowfrost's collar. And some cats were downright rude. One cat called her fat, while another kept getting too close. *The nerve of some kittypets. I don't know how much more of this I can take.*

"C'mon, Snowfrost! There's just one more cat I'd like you to meet!" Misty mewed.
Snowfrost resisted the urge to groan. *Please let this one be tolerable*. The two she-cat jogged back down the gravel path, in the direction of their den. They passed it, stopping in front of the third house down the row. *This was the first house I saw when I'd arrived at Twolegplace*, Snowfrost realized. She hadn't recognized it from the back. Misty called to her, leading her beneath the fence and to the back door of the house.
Unlike the other yards they'd visited, there was no kittypet waiting outside. Nor was there any openings for a cat to crawl through like in some of the houses. There was, however, a large space open within the house. But when Snowfrost moved to try and walk inside, she was blocked by an invisible barrier. It felt like the same thing used on windows.

"It's a sliding glass door. We won't be able to get inside unless the housefolk opens it up. But they won't."
They won't? Snowfrost's mind parroted. Then, how were they going to meet the cat who supposedly lived inside this place? Misty answered that question with a chorus of yowls. Her noise brought forth the attention of a cat within the den. The kittypet trotted up to the glass, carefully seating herself in front of it. This cat was a bit strange looking. She had a pointed head with a muzzel shorter than a Grassclan cat's. Large ears, and smooth white and black patched fur. She appeared to have a black rabbit's tail instead of a cat's. And her eyes were a lovely shade of blue. The cat's most noticeable feature was her plump belly. Though it didn't appear squishy or flabby. Snowfrost knew by sight alone this cat was pregnant. Perhaps as far along as she was.

"Usagi, hello!" Misty meowed loudly. "It's good to see you. Meet my new housemate, Snowfrost."

"It is good to see you too, Misty. Hello, Snowfrost. It is lovely to

meet you." The cat, Usagi, dipped her head in greetings. Her voice was very soothing, although muffled by the glass in their way. "Where do you come from? You look quite exotic. Perchance, are you a purebred like I am? It would be wonderful to know more show cats outside of the show ring."

"I come from the meadow," Snowfrost answer simply. "I'm not sure what a 'purebred' is, I'm afraid. Or a 'show ring.' "

Usagi shuffled her paws a bit; she seemed to be getting nervous. "You are...a stray? A wild cat?"

Snowfrost twitched her whiskers. "I am. Or, rather, I was. I live here now. I came here to give my kits a good life. I see you are expecting, too. Has your pregnancy been going well?"

At the mention of kits, Usagi seemed to brighten. "My pregnancy is well monitored. My housefolk take excellent care of us. He says that I should expect four kittens. I am sure my mate will be pleased. Speaking of him, I must return to my nest. Misty knows how mad Hiro becomes when I talk to cats outside of the house." Usagi rose to her paws, giving herself a good stretch. "Until next time, Misty, Snowfrost." The molly dipped her head once more before turning and walking out of sight, deeper into her den.

"Isn't she nice?" Misty asked. "I'm sure you two will become fast friends over time. Anyways, we'd better get home. I bet it's almost lunchtime!"
Snowfrost's belly began to growl at the mention of a meal. Her kits seemed to squirm in response as well. With an agreeing nod, the two mollies left the show cat's house behind, padding down the line back to their own den.

Chapter 6

The next day, Snowfrost woke up bright and early. She felt more chipper today than the one before, refreshed by a good night's rest and a full belly. Her unborn kits seemed content too, not making much of a fuss inside of her execpt to test their new growing limbs. What would she do today? Snowfrost pondered this question as she did her morning routine, wasing her pelt. Perhaps she could go outside today, maybe even away from the kittypets. The thought was compelling. Snowfrost sat up when she was satisfied with her cleanliness. A clear plan was settled into her mind. With a heave, the pregnant molly made her way to the front door. She looked around cautiously for her denmate, not wanting to be caught by her. About two bear lengths away, Misty was awake playing with one of her many toys. This time it was a vine which had a fake fish tied to the end of it. *Is this really how kittypets entertain themselves all day?* Snowfrost resisted the urge to snort. This certainly wasn't much of a way to live. Perhaps though, this was what Misty found enjoyable. Regardless, Snowfrost found it to be stupid.
With a shake of her head, Snowfrost tiptoed past Misty's line of sight and out the door through an opening.
Fresh air filtered itself around her as Snowfrost emerged into the open. Early morning birdsong filled the air, welcoming in a sunny day. It was nice out, although a bit chilly. But it wasn't anything Snowfrost couldn't handle. Fluffing up a little, the lynx point molly padded through the yard. Where would she go today, she wondered. Perhaps she would aimlessly wander around to learn the territory-neighborhood- better. And maybe visit that odd kittypet, Usagi. First, though, she'd have to find the show cat's house on her own. It wouldn't be too hard. *Three dens down, right?* She thought to herself as she slipped out of the yard. As Snowfrost padded along, she took in the scenery that the territory had to offer. Most of the houses looked the same, with varying colored tops and different fencing marking each territory. And on the opposite side, beyond the Twolegplace, was a forest. *Isn't that Treeclan's territory?* Snowfrost realized. The fur on the back of her neck began to rise.

She hoped no passing warrior would see her here.
Regardless of her worry, Snowfrost pressed on. She slid through a hole in the fence of Usagi's garden when she reached her territory, peering ahead at the house. Usagi was laying by the glass door, splayed out so sunlight could warm her pregnant belly. Her eyes were closed, a peaceful smile was on her face. She looked so content. Snowfrost hated to bother her. But before she had a chance to, she was spotted.
A new cat appeared by the invisible door, similar looking to Usagi but larger. The cat had a sturdier build and less black patches on their fur. They also appeared to be taller, and physically fit by kittypet standards. The cat was bristling, staring right at Snowfrost. They let out a hiss, startling Usagi.

"Hiro, my love, what ever is the matter?" Snowfrost heard the show cat meep.

"There is a stray here," the tom snarled. Usagi blinked and turned her gaze, smiling a little when she finally noticed her visitor. She pushed herself to her paws, her nubny black tail raising high happily.

"Calm yourself, Hiro. It is only Snowfrost. She is Misty's new housemate. She is not a stray anymore, she is a house cat just like us. She's a very nice cat, you two may get along, if you were to give her a chance-"

"So she was a stray?" Hiro growled, interrupting his mate. The tom seemed to grow angrier as he discovered this information. In fact, he seemed to ignore everything else Usagi had said. Hiro's only focus was on the fact that Snowfrost had been born wild. Usagi shrank in her place, folding back her ears. She seemed instantly regretful of her words. Hiro wiggled his nubby tail, baring his teeth threateningly. "*You*. Get out of our housefolk's garden. Filth like you is not welcomed here!"

Filth?! Snowfrost drew her ears back in fury. She wanted to spit at this tom, argue with him to make him understand the error of his insult. She was no meer stray, not like one Hiro had ever known. Snowfrost was not dirty and lawless like some rouge, she was a healer. Sophisticated, well trained, a servant of Starclan. Her

parents and Softpetal had raised her right. Unlike Hiro's family, clearly. This cat needed to be taught a lesson.
But before she could lash out, Snowfrost stopped herself. One look at Usagi showed that this was no time for a fight. The queen was scared, and anxious. Two things that were no good for an expecting cat. So regrettably Snowfrost bit her tongue. She lashed her tail and turned herself around. She walked out of the garden and traveled three houses down, back to her own new territory. She would come vack another time to visit Usagi, hopefully at a time when Hiro was not around.
For now, Snowfrost would have to find something else to entertain herself. Arriving at the house, Snowfrost jumped onto the fence, ready to leap down and go back inside for a little while. But something stopped her. Some strange sense within her heart compelled her to stay. To turn around. To watch the trees. Snowfrost narrowed her eyes as she peered across the yard into the forest beyond. If she looked hard enough, perhaps she could catch a glimpse of some forest cats. How often did Treeclan check this border, she wondered. Why was she doing this in the first place? Snowfrost shook her head, about to force herself to turn around. She felt ridiculous. But then, there was movement in the bushes beyond. Snowfrost's breath caught as four cats emerged from the woods. Among the patrol she could make out the pelts of the warriors Beetlenose and Robinspots. Treeclan's deputy, Thornberry was also in the group. But Snowfrost wasn't interested in any of them. She was most interested in the fouth cat. Wolfheart was among the patrol, padding by Thornberry's side. Snowfrost felt her heart leap for joy at the sight of him. She could hardly stop herself leaping off the fence, running ahead at full speed directly towards the patrol. But she caught herself before it was too late, diving into a nearby bush to hide. In the safety of her shrub, the pregnant she-cat could observe the enemy patrol without worry.

"Tell me, Wolfpaw, what do you scent at the border?" Snowfrost heard Thornberry ask. *Wolfpaw?* Snowfrost's belly twisted. *He's been punished. Given a Warriorpaw ceremony. But why..?*

"Nothing unusual," Wolfpaw reported after giving the air a brief sniff. His voice was flat; he sounded completely disinterested in the report. "There's a pregnant kittypet nearby. Can't tell how close, but

the scent's fresh. Other than that, everything seems fine."
Was she that obvious? Snowfrost felt embarrassed that she could be so easily detected. But at least none of the cats knew the smell was hers. Nor did they seem to realise how close she was to them.

"Excellent work," Thornberry praised as if he were Wolfpaw's mentor. *Perhaps he's the one who was assigned to "reteach" him.*
Wolfpaw smiled, although his eyes betrayed him. The tom seemed ashamed by the treatment he was receiving. But that was the point of undergoing a Warriorpaw ceremony. Snowfrost pitied him.
"Come on, let's check the Grassclan border next. After that we can go home and get something to eat."
The other toms meowed in agreement, wasting no time in turning tail and retreating back into the trees. Wolfpaw lingered behind his clanmates to stare off into Twolegplace for a few heartbeats. Snowfrost wondered if perhaps he did recognize her scent. Should she reveal herself now that he was alone? *No. Wolfheart doesn't need to see me like this*, she decided. Snowfrost waited for the tom to finally leave before crawling out from beneath the bush. She slinked her way back to her new home, clumsily jumping up and over the fence, and walked herself into her den without so much as a glance behind her.

"Oh there you are! I was starting to worry about you. Where did you go?" Misty mewed as Snowfrost padded past. The lynx point molly didn't say a word to her companion. She simply moved on, towards the back of the house, and into the closet she had taken up as her nesting area. Misty followed behind her the entire way.

"I needed some fresh air," Snowfrost finally answered as she settled onto a Twoleg pelt. She didn't want to bother with explaining herself. But Misty seemed dissatisfied with her response. The grey tabby furrowed her brow, swaying her tail with concern. Snowfrost simply glanced away.
For some reason, Misty seemed to take this as an invitation to come lay beside her. The other she-cat curled her fluffy body around Snowfrost's, resting her tail along her flank. Snowfrost's kits shuffled within her in response to the foreign touch. They seemed to enjoy it.

"Maybe you'll want to talk about it later?" Misty wondered aloud.

"Perhaps," was the simple reply Snowfrost gave in return. She felt a bit too flustered now to say anything, a welcomed change from the moodiness that kept her from sharing previously. It was so strange to have another cat to curl up with. Snowfrost hadn't had any cat lay beside her like this since Wolfheart had broken up with her. Jaybird had snuggled with her then, comforting Snowfrost as she cried over her love that'd left her for another molly. Jaybird was the only cat in Grassclan that knew about the relationship. Snowfrost was grateful for her support. Perhaps now she could trust this new cat to lift her spirits, as her sister had done in the past. They were living together after all. Soon, Misty would probably be helping Snowfrost entertaine her kits. It was a nice thought. Snowfrost decided now that she'd allow herself to let her guard down, at least a little, and to let this other cat into her life.

For the remainder of their time awake, the two she-cats shared tongues and talked. Snowfrost finally came around and explained where she'd been, and explained a little bit about why she was here in Twolegplace. Misty was understanding, and a very good listener. She told a few jokes to make Snowfrost smile when her explanation started to bring her down. It was appreciated. Snowfrost hadn't felt this happy in a while. Soon enough, talking led to fatigue and the two mollies settled down for a nap.

Chapter 7

Time seemed to pass on quicker from that day on. Before Snowfrost knew it, an entire moon had passed since her arrival at Twolegplace. The end of her pregnancy was drawing near. But for the time she had been a kittypet, giving birth was one of the last things on her mind.
To this day she was learning about Twoleg things. And when Misty wasn't busy educating her, the kittypet was busy boasting about how her Twoleg-*their housefolk*- was the best in the neighborhood. Misty made mention of how their housefolk was the only one to feed its house cats actual meat instead of regular kittypet food, and let them sleep in its bed for warmth if they so choose. She snickered about the jealousy other cats would express, saying some of them even tried to move in with her before.
When she wasn't boasting, Misty was pestering Snowfrost to talk about life in the wild. It was hard for her to talk about, Snowfrost still missed her life in the meadow dearly. But to entertain the other she-cat she spoke of it anyways. She'd tell Misty of battles once described to her by Grassclan warriors who'd shown up to her den injured, and talked about how she'd help the queens have their kits. She spoke about the feeling of the wind blowing through one's fur, the smell of grass and wildflowers clinging to one's pelt, and the reassurance that the clan was always with you even when you're all alone.

"It sounds like fun, but I don't think that life would be better than the life we have here." She'd usually say.

"It isn't supposed to be fun," Snowfrost would respond, usually with annoyance. "Being a warrior and living in a clan is hard work."

It never seemed to get through to the molly but Snowfrost didn't really care. She figured Misty got enough freedom when the two of them were allowed out to explore the neighborhood. On the house's front door was a square shaped hole covered over by a weird veil.

Snowfrost and Misty would use it to come in and out as they pleased whenever it was open. Outside, the pair were usually hanging around with some of the other kittypets in the neighborhood. Snowfrost kept her distance from them, rancorous about having to be considered one of them. When she saw Misty and her friends, she was reminded of the life she left behind, and the new one she and her little family would lead. In this world she was Snowflake; a former stray, turned house cat and soon-to-be-mother. Here, she was no better than any other kittypet. It sickened her.
No matter how well she adjusted, every day in this place drove her mad. As Snowfrost learned the territory better she began to wander off on her own more. She needed space and time to think, away from the suffocating life with Twolegs. Snowfrost would often look at the meadow beyond Twolegplace with longing, then steer herself back towards the houses. Sometimes she'd go into neighboring yards to look in the windows and see how other kittypets lived. Most of the time she'd find them with their Twolegs, playing with them, laying on their laps. She'd wonder how they could be content with such a life, never having a care in the world.

On many of her explorations, Snowfrost would take the time to visit her newfound friend Usagi. Usagi was the cat Snowfrost would talk to the most in Twolegplace, along with Misty. Though conversations with the show cat were challenging; between the glass door that always seperated them, and the meddling of Usagi's jerk of a mate. Still they managed to make a friendship work. Snowfrost came to learn how overly sheltered Usagi was compared to most kittypets. For instance, she had never been outside on her own before, without being confined in a crate by her housefolk. Although Snowfrost had come to know this to be an average ordeal; a lot of kittypets were not allowed outside. What was strange though, was Usagi didn't seem to know how to function without the assistance of Twolegs. Her Twolegs would groom her fur, feed her on a precise schedule, and dress her in various gaudy looking pelts for warmth, as well as something Usagi referred to as "fashion". More recently, the Twolegs started keeping Usagi isolated in a room the closer she came to giving birth. Usagi didn't seem to have much enrichment in her environment, and so she took great interest in Snowfrost during visits. Though if Hiro even suspected the pair

were conversing he would snap at his mate, and herd Usagi back to the "safety" of her room. Snowfrost pitied the poor queen. So much, that she'd taken to visiting her quite regularly, to talk and to check on her condition. Even if Usagi was being watched over by her Twolegs and mate, nothing beat the watchful eye of a medicine cat.
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or this evening's visit, Snowfrost jumped onto a window ledge of by the back of the house to look in on the kittypet queen. She watched Usagi as she stepped into a nest and curled herself around something squirming inside. Nestled against the she-cat's belly were four newborn kits, all carbon copies of herself. Snowfrost could see how their thin pelts still shined with the wetness of afterbirth. This was her third litter, Snowfrost recalled Usagi informing her.
A pit formed in lynx point molly's stomach as she watched the happy family. These kits would never have to learn the hardships of the wild. All they'd ever know, and all their ancestors ever knew, was right there in that house. They'd get to lead soft lives full of dullness and boundaries. And one day, when they're old enough, they would be seperated. Snowfrost caught herself thinking about how her kits would come to be just like these kittypets, never knowing what true freedom tastes like. They would never learn to hunt, never get to experience the thrill of a naming ceremony. They would never celebrate clan holidays like Bloom's Day or The Longest Night and truly understand what they stand for. Would they even believe in Starclan? Would being fat, careless housecats really be the best life for them?

As the days grew closer to her kitting these thoughts nagged Snowfrost more and more. Until one day it became unbearable.

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"Rest your head on my shoulder," Wolfheart purred. Snowfrost wasted no time moving closer to her love, pressing her more slender body into his. How had he even convinced her to climb up onto Split Rock? Sure no cat was here to yell at them for it, but Snowfrost still felt out of her element up here, like she could fall at any moment. But she knew she wouldn't fall, Wolfheart wouldn't let her. And even if she did, he'd be right here to catch her. Perhaps that's what persuaded her up here. She knew she could trust Wolfheart. She knew the risk was worth it, every

heartbeat. A soft sigh escaped her muzzle, laced with content and relaxation. Wolfheart's fur was comfortable against her side, providing cushioning and reinforcement as the two cats sat there in the wide clearing, staring up at the soon to be full moon. The light cast silver sparkles along their pelts, illuminating them to look almost as brilliant as warriors of Starclan. Silverpelt shined favor upon them and Snowfrost felt an air of exultation about her. The future seemed so bright. Their love was strong, and their bond was perfect. Snowfrost felt butterflies in her stomach as she turned to Wolfheart and requested something special. She wanted to start a family. Although flustered, Wolfheart seemed excited by the idea. The pair stayed together for most of the night discussing how wonderful their kits would be. They'd be the perfect warriors; intelligent like Snowfrost, and strong like Wolfheart. Most of all they'd be loyal to their family, despite the distance they'd have with one of their parents. The pair grew more energized the longer they spoke, eventually leaping off of Split Rock to pad through the neutral territory to have some quality time. By sunrise, Snowfrost felt a change within herself. She could tell life was going to be more eventful from this point on, and sge couldn't wait to see how things would turn out.

It was late into the night. Snowfrost woke with a start. A terrible feeling overcame the pregnant she-cat as she blinked open her tired blue eyes. Something inside of her was screaming, telling Snowfrost that this house, this neighborhood, wasn't safe enough for her to have her kits. An incredible new instinct overcame her and drove her to leave the warmth of her nest. As carefully as she could, Snowfrost snuck away from Misty's side and out of the closet. She padded over to the veil in the front door, pawing at it to see if it was open. When the flap moved, she was assured her escape. But before she could slip out a voice mewled out to her.

"Snowfrost?" Misty called from behind her. Snowfrost turned to face her denmate. A look of sadness was plastered on the silver tabby's face. "You're going away, aren't you?" She asked suddenly, as if she could read the older she-cat's mind.

"I have to..."

"I know you're not happy here," Misty interrupted. "But I could help you if you stayed! I'm great with kits, I could watch them for you while you play with the berries and flowers in the garden. Usagi

could watch them too. And-and we can ask some of the loners if they can teach us how to hunt, and-"

"Misty." Snowfrost's mew was stern. "I know your intentions are good, and I am grateful for all of your help and support that you've provided this past moon. But this isn't the life I dreamed my kits would have. My kittens are supposed to become warriors. Each of them has strong warrior blood coursing through their veins. Their place is in the meadow, chasing rabbits and fighting battles. Not living in a house, playing with feather toys and curling up on some Twoleg's lap without a care. The Land's Star is part of them, as much as it's part of me. I *have* to go back."

Misty took a step forward, folding her ears back. "...Then take me with you."

"No."

"But I don't want you to go away! I'd miss you... It was so lonely here before you came. I like having a denmate, even if you are a bit standoffish sometimes. Seeing my friends for a limited amount of time every day just isn't enough. I need a companion. I need *you,* Snowfrost." Misty took another step forward, lowering her head. "I'll be a good warrior. I'll do everything your leader says, and work really hard to learn how to hunt and fight. Or maybe I could be a medicine cat, like you-"

"*No*," Snowfrost repeated herself, putting more harshness into her tone. "Your place is with your Twolegs. Besides, you like being a kittypet too much. I couldn't ask you to give up such a comfortable life all to come away with me. You aren't built for running across the meadow, or clawing at an enemy warrior, or even sorting through herbs. You would be just as miserable as a clan cat as I am as a house cat."
All went quiet for a while, the tension so thick between them that a cat could slice through it with a claw. The two mollies held each other's gaze waiting for the other to speak. But no sound came out, not until a rough kick slammed against Snowfrost's flank. She winced, backing up a bit. She hissed in pain, crouching on the floor for a heartbeat. After the pain began to ebb away, Snowfrost rose to her paws shakily. Her kits withered inside of her, as if impatient or

distressed. *Let's go, mama*, they seemed to be urging her. In an instant Snowfrost whipped around and ran through the veil of the door, across the yard and to the fence. Climbing over it was a challenge, but she pulled through. When she was settled in the grass on the other side, something compelled her to look back. Whipping around, Snowfrost saw Misty leap onto the fence, watching her friend from the barrier with dark, depressed eyes. Her tail-tip swished slowly. Glimmering tears now streamed down her face, caught in the light of the moon. For just a moment, Snowfrost's heart ached.

"Goodbye..." Misty mewed solemnly.
Snowfrost dipped her head and forced herself to turn around. The pregnant molly stalked away into the night without so much as a glance behind her.

A/N: This story will be continued when "Signs of the Moon, Book 1: Moon Rise" has been concluded, as this Super Edition contains important information that's yet to be revealed in the main series. Until then, thank you for reading. See you all back here again soon!

Chapter 8

Run. That's what the voice in Snowfrost's head demanded her to do. It wasn't the sound of her ancestors in Starclan, but a deep rooted voice of maternal instinct, urging her to return to her homeland to find a place--the perfect place--to bring her kittens into the world. It was almost time. Her kits moved around inside of her, more lively than ever before. Snowfrost wouldn't rest until she had at least crossed the border. *Anywhere on Grassclan territory will be good enough for me*, she thought. She traveled for a long time, long into the night. Her limbs grew tired and her kits thrashed in her belly, but she kept pressing forward until she finally crossed the barrier. Familiar scents flooded into her nostrils as she ran into the meadow. *I'm home!*

Her sprint turned into a trot, which turned into limping, until she finally collapsed on the ground with exhaustion. She panted, laying on her side awkwardly to let her kits rest on the familiar grounds of Grassclan while she caught her breath. Snowfrost nosed at her belly for a heartbeat before she tilted her head to look up into the sky. Silverpelt shined above her, glittering with hundreds of stars. But clouds were gathering menacingly. It was going to rain soon. Snowfrost needed to get up and find some shelter. With effort, she heaved herself back onto her paws, much to the dislike of her unborn brood. She huffed and waddled along. *Maybe I could go into The Dip?* She wondered, but quickly dismissed the idea. The Dip was nothing more than a giant ditch. Once it rained, it would fill with water. Certainly not a good place to stay. *Perhaps I could find an old rabbit's burrow?* No, a rabbit den could barely fit one full grown warrior, yet alone a pregnant cat who was due to kit at any moment. Snowfrost paused in her stride to think for a heartbeat. Where else could she go? The lynx point molly scanned the meadow, looking for somewhere that might be good. As she did so, a memory popped into her head. A short while ago, Grassclan had discovered that a badger had made its home in the meadow, not too far from where Snowfrost now stood. They had chased it out, leaving its den unoccupied. *The badger set*. That would be the place

where her kits would be born. In a flash she set off, scanning the ground in search of the den. Light began to filter above her head as she looked, only for it to be cast over by storm clouds. *The dawn patrol will be coming soon. I have to hurry*. Snowfrost began to awkwardly trot forward, whipping her head around to look for her birthing place. It was around here somewhere, she knew she had to be close. Snowfrost started to head southwards, closer to the border, too afraid of going near Grassclan's camp. *It can't be much farther. Rabbit dung, where is that badger set!?* The sky was completely light now, or as light as it could become. Clouds overcast the sky above, a chilly wind stirring through the dull colored grass. With the wind, the grass parted for heartbeats at a time, at last revealing the location of the old badger's den. It was only four bear lengths ahead. If she hurried Snowfrost could put together a nest and make herself comfortable inside before the rain started. A noise caught Snowfrost's attention making her become still. The scent of several Grassclan cats drifted into her nose. Panic shot through her, her kits quaked inside her belly with worry. She crouched down, praying to Starclan that they wouldn't find her.

"Yuck, what's that stench?" A cat hissed. Snowfrost realized it must be her they smelled. She'd almost forgotten the Twoleg stink that clung to her, she'd gotten so used to it after living with them for a moon. She slipped along the meadow floor, hiding herself in a tussock of grass. But she hadn't realized it was right in the cats' path.

"Woah!" A cat tripped over Snowfrost, falling a tail length in front of her. They sat up, shaking their pale golden head. The cat's eyes narrowed, focusing on the shape they saw in the grass.
"Snowfrost..?" The cat rose to their paws to stare down at the pregnant she-cat. Above the queen hovered her apprentice.

"Hello, Goldenpaw."

Goldenpaw looked at her, confusion written on her face. Questions spilled out of her like water through the cracks of a beaver dam.
"Where have you been? Why do you smell like a Twoleg? Why are so...? Snowfrost, are you *pregnant*?"
Snowfrost folded her ears against her head, shame turning her stomach. She didn't want any clan cat except Wolfheart to know.

And now an entire patrol would learn of her mistake. The other cats who were out with Goldenpaw came into view. Standing beside her now was Jaybird and Ambereye.

"Snowfrost!" Jaybird trilled, leaning down to press her forehead to hers. "I knew you couldn't stay away. And it looks like you've returned just in time." Thunder began to rumble in the sky. Snowfrost growled, backing away enough to be able to stand.

"I only came to deliver my kits," she meowed indignantly, a feeling of rage overcoming her. "I have not come to return to the clan."

"Clearly." Ambereye snorted, eyeing her collar. "Having fun being a Twoleg's toy, *kittypet*?"
Snowfrost hissed at her. She was in no mood to argue with the ginger she-cat. But if she had to she'd fight her to reach the badger set. Another harsh kick was thrown in Snowfrost's belly, making her visibly wince. She needed to get away from here, before she was in too much pain to move anymore. Snowfrost didn't bother to reply, she simply began to slink along the ground slowly, too wary and in too much pain to attempt to stand on her own anymore. Goldenpaw and the others began to follow after her.

"Where are you going?" Jaybird asked.

"Away from here," Snowfrost hissed. She didn't have time to chat anymore, her kits would be here soon, nothing would stop her from preparing.

"Let us help you," Jaybird pleaded as Goldenpaw came around to stand in her way.
"Goldenpaw, please help me convince her."

"Are you serious?" Snowfrost snorted "She is still an apprentice! Why would I listen to what she has to say when i hardly want to listen to you, my own sister?"

"I may only be an apprentice, Snowfrost. But I am Grassclan's medicine cat. Doubting me, and my skills, would be like having doubt in your own."
Snowfrost winced, not from pain and not from the chilly wind

which had begun to stir, but from Goldenpaw's harsh words. "As a medicine cat, I have to look out for those who are unwell. And the Code says I must help anyone in need, even if they are not from my clan. So like it or not, Jaybird and I will follow you wherever you go until your kitting begins." Goldenpaw's voice was stern, something that was out of character for her. Snowfrost knew how serious she must be. She let out a harsh sigh, standing up as straight as she could.

"Help me over to the badger set."

Chapter 9

Warning: this chapter features depictions of birth and all the pain that comes with it. Sensitive readers are advised to skip this chapter

A loud clap of thunder sounded from the skies above, and a sense of urgency pulled at Snowfrost's pelt. It was going to storm any moment now. Just as her kitting would begin. She had to find a safe place to give birth and fast. With the help of her clanmates, hopefully she would find that place.

But it turned out that the badger set wasn't what Snowfrost had expected. She didn't think it would be covered over with earth; a preventative measure taken to stop the badger from nesting again. Now all that was left of the set was a small hole where the badger had been trying to dig. It was barely deep enough to provide Snowfrost shelter, but at the very least it would protect her kits from the downpour. It wasn't the safest place to give birth. But there wasn't time to find another place to settle. The kits were coming.

"Should we dig a deeper hole, then?" Jaybird asked.

Ambereye shrugged; "Wouldn't hurt to try." She padded forward, unsheathing her claws, already getting to work on the project. Snowfrost held up her tail, ordering the warrior to stop before any major construction could be accomplished.

"It's too late," she sighed.
It finally began to rain. Gentle drops plopped one by one against the ground surrounding them, picking up speed and volume within heartbeats. Large raindrops began piercing through fluffed up fur, soaking the four she-cats right to their skins. Jaybird helped Snowfrost lumber over to the badger set, guiding her to settle herself down with her belly facing into the hole. Just as a good queen would. And she had done so just in time. A striking pain gripped Snowfrost's belly, causing her to shriek. She gritted her

teeth, squinting her eyes shut as tight as she could.

She was vaugely aware of the cats that scurried around her. Goldenpaw tucked dry, soft grass beneath her flanks to make her more comfortable, while Ambereye padded over with a wad of soaked moss. Snowfrost barely heard Goldenpaw instruct Jaybird to fetch a stick. Her ears were ringing, heart pounding in her chest. When she opened her eyes once the pain had subsided, the world seemed clouded in a haze. Focusing was difficult, all she could bring herself to consciously do at the moment was pant. The world grew a little lighter as Snowfrost flicked her gaze onto Goldenpaw. The pale golden she-cat sat by her rear, watching her attentively. Her eyes turned when she felt the presence of another cat approach with her whiskers. It was Jaybird with a stick. Jaybird's muffled mew told her sister to bite into it, making Snowfrost part her jaws to take it in. It didn't seem to have a taste, the stick didn't even seem to be real. Nothing did. The world became nothing but a hazy shadow trapping her as pain tore at her mercilessly. Even when her belly did not spasm, a dull unquitting ache still hung around. Snowfrost groaned just as another wave of torment rippled through her. Her hazy world began to turn red, enclosing itself around her as she cried out in agony. It gripped tightly, blurring her vision until everything seemed to go black. Her teeth pierced deep into the stick she held, gripping onto it with dear life, as if that were her only anchor to reality. The red world faded, bringing back her atmosphere of haze. At least with that, she could make out what was going on around her. She could at least comprehend what was happening on now. Something was pulling at her from the base of her tail, and Snowfrost could feel her kits fighting inside of her, tumbling over each other for the right to be first born.

"You're doing great," she heard Jaybird assure. She felt her tongue rasping against her head calmingly. For the first time since they had been reunited, Snowfrost found herself to be grateful for her sister's presence. She was an experienced queen; having her there as a guide through all the confusion made Snowfrost feel safe. She also found herself to be thankful for Goldenpaw's presence. Snowfrost was in no shape to be keeping an eye on her own kitting, she was glad to have a medicine cat around to lend a helping paw.

"I can see the head of the first kit. When the pain starts again, I need you to push," Goldenpaw instructed. Snowfrost nodded, putting the stick down to lick her lips. Ambereye pushed the soaked moss closer to her so that she could have something to drink. Snowfrost lapped like it would be the last bit of water she would ever have. To her, it felt like it was. Another spasm shook her. Jaybird forced the stick back into her mouth before she had time to clamp her jaws shut. The world fell back into the red prison, encasing Snowfrost inside of it as she felt herself being torn apart. But then, something managed to break through. Snowfrost's world brightened suddenly. She lifted her head to look behind her. There she saw Goldenpaw tending to a small slimey white shape. She watched the young medicine cat nip at the transparent sac surrounding it, freeing the creature's head. Snowfrost blinked, stiffening as she heard it begin to wail. Goldenpaw helped the kit over to Snowfrost's belly, looking down at it with fondness before returning to her post.
"It's a tom," she announced.

Snowfrost's hazy little world had opened just enough to welcome him in. For the first time, some of the haze began to fade. The image of the creature beside her became clear to Snowfrost. This was her kit, her perfect little son. Snowfrost curled her body around him, shielding her baby from the pouring rain. She bent her head down to lap at his fur backwards, cleaning him up as he latched onto her and began to nurse. A purr rumbled in her throat, and all felt well. At least, for a few heartbeats. A new wave of torture engulfed her suddenly, stronger than before. The next kit was clawing its way to freedom. Snowfrost's tail lifted as she felt something new pushing at her, fighting its way to join the world. Goldenpaw stood on her paws, running one against Snowfrost's flank to guide the next kit out of her. A short while later it came tumbling out, wiggling violently as it did. Goldenpaw broke its birthing sac, and almost immediately the kit began to yowl.
"A molly."

The pale golden she-cat placed this grey and white tabby kitten beside the first, but closer in reach to Jaybird. The silver tabby bent over Snowfrost to help her groom her, urging it to latch onto its mother. At last she did, and just in time too. The third kit was ready

to make an appearance. This birth felt a bit easier than the last. The pain was still gruesome and Snowfrost still wanted to yowl loud enough for the oldest Starclan cats to hear, but the kitten slid out of her much more easily than the former two had. Goldenpaw freed the kit as soon as she could, passing it onto Ambereye. The kitten mewled pathetically, pawing at its sister as it wiggled closer to suckle from its mother.

"Another molly," Goldenpaw informed her. Once again Snowfrost's world expanded to invite the kit in. The haze was almost gone now, Snowfrost could see all of her kits even clearer. The third kit was silver and white, baring a striking resemblance to her father. *Wolfheart*...pain throbbed inside of Snowfrost, but not from her kits. Her heart ached for Wolfheart. She longed to have him by her side along with Goldenpaw and Jaybird. She'd rather he be the one meowing encouragement and warming their third kit than Ambereye and Jaybird fulfilling the tasks. But he probably didn't care. Wolfheart had left her for another cat, as if she were so easily replaced. Though she wanted him here, Snowfrost was glad that he wasn't. If he wouldn't be with her, he was better off not knowing of her kitting.
Things began to relax for a while. Snowfrost's belly felt hollow for the first time since she'd become pregnant. But something didn't feel right.
"I can feel one more kit," Goldenpaw mewed as she pressed her paws into Snowfrost's flank.
"Here it comes."
Snowfrost felt herself pushing the last kitten out without much effort. Though at the end as it slipped out, a searing pain rippled through her one last time. Snowfrost panted heavily, looking back at her last born. It didn't move. A sudden fear came over her, making the lynx point molly want to jump out of her fur. Was the kit alright? Goldenpaw broke through its birthing sac, licking the tiny silver kitten clean. But it still didn't move, still didn't make a sound. Snowfrst held her breath as she watched Goldenpaw nudge the kit. When that didn't work she nosed at it's belly. Still nothing. Finally she began to press on its tiny flank with a paw, pushing a few times. All fell silent, only the sound of the rain pattering against the meadow ground echoed around them. Until finally a tiny little mew came out. All four she-cat sighed with relief, with Goldenpaw

grinning proudly.
"Another molly. You now have one son and three daughters. Congratulations, Snowfrost," she purred, picking the last kitten up to place alongside her littermates. Together, four perfect kits brightened Snowfrost's world. The haze disappeared, and only the light of her new little family shined. Snowfrost bent down to lick her little ones, shooing Jaybird and Ambereye away so she could get closer to them. She wrapped her tail around her brood, keeping them dry from the storm outside their little dirt hole.

"Oh Snowfrost, they're beautiful." Jaybird rubbed her cheek against her sister's purring approvingly. Snowfrost licked her forehead before turning her attention back onto the kits. Her heart swelled with joy, fit to burst with all the love she felt for them. It was fiercer than any love she had ever known before. It felt good; motherhood felt amazing. *I would do anything for you*. She bent down to lick her kittens once more, pressing her nose to each of their heads to drink in their scents.

"We should get them back to camp, before they catch a cold from all this rain. Or Starclan forbid the fade reaches them," Ambereye suggested, shaking out her pelt. Rain water splattered onto Snowfrost, causing her to hiss.

"Watch it, you almost soaked my kits!" She snarled, curling herself tighter around them.

"Well see? If we get them to camp then that won't happen," Ambereye responded smugly. *Ignorant flea-brain*, Snowfrost lashed her tail.

"Perhaps Ambereye is right. The clouds are only getting thicker, I doubt the storm will break anytime soon. We should go," Goldenpaw agreed.

"But we can't just leave Snowfrost," Jaybird objected. "She doesn't want to return with us. We can't just help her birth her kits then make off with them!"

"You will do no such thing." Snowfrost rose to her paws, wobbling. Jaybird immediately came to her side, letting her sister lean against

her shoulder.
"I will return back to camp with you all, at least until the rain stops. I could not make it anywhere on my own in this condition."

"Then let's go," Ambereye meowed, bending down to pick up Snowfrost's silver and white kit. Goldensong picked up the white kit to pass on to Snowfrost, then the silver and white tabby to give to Jaybird. Finally she picked up the little silver kitten, coming to stand by Snowfrost's other flank. Together the four she-cats traveled across the rain swept meadow, back to Grassclan's camp.

Chapter 10

The trek back home was long and anxiety enducing for Snowfrost. She was utterly exhausted, and still in quite some pain from her kitting. But that all seemed like a minor nuisance compared to the fierce protective instincts raging within her now. Jaybird, Ambereye, and Goldenpaw were carrying three of her newborns, and Snowfrost was resisting the urge to box their ears for it. She wanted nothing more than pull her kits back to her belly, and keep all prying eyes away from them. It wasn't logical. Snowfrost knew that her kittens were safe. But her maternal instincts didn't care; couldn't differentiate friend from foe. It was an annoying feeling. This was nothing like Snowfrost. She wasn't the physically aggressive type. Nor was she very protective over any particular clanmates. But this was different. These were her kits that she was risking herself for; ready to fight tooth and claw to defend. Silly as it may be, Snowfrost could understand why queens could be so snappy when it came to their little ones. Even if the need to protect was unnecessary in the moment. *I'm sorry that I ever doubted the strength of a mother's love.*

The rain was subsiding a little, allowing the faintest bits of sunlight to trickle through the clouds as the patrol made it's way up one last hill. Apprehensively, Snowfrost followed her clanmates towards the bushes which surrounded Grassclan's camp. Her anxiety seemed to peak at this moment, as she stood in front of the bramble tunnel. It had been an entire moon since she'd stepped paw on this land. A whole moon since she had been Grassclan's medicine cat. How would the clan feel, seeing her return? How did Snowfrost feel about it? She did not know exactly. Relieved for sure; Snowfrost had missed the meadow terribly. But there were other emotions making her belly bubble.

As she stood there, trying to ponder them, Jaybird stopped to shoulder her. Snowfrost jolted slightly feeling her littermate's touch, but softened, seeing the reassurance in her eyes. Jaybird tilted her head gently, inviting Snowfrost to go ahead of her into the tunnel. Snowfrost nodded slightly, and finally slipped through.

As they made their way through the bramble tunnel, several pairs

of eyes were already upon the patrol from the dens. The mewling of helpless kits had most likely alarmed the clan. If it were not that, then it was the Twoleg stench which clung heavily to Snowfrost's pelt and the tinkling of her collar's bell. Either way, they had an audience to greet them. Snowfrost wanted to shrink back, shame prickling her pelt. Now the whole clan would see what she'd done, and realize where she'd been. Her reputation was ruined for sure. But for a few heartbeats, Snowfrost didn't care. She could still preform her medicine cat duties, even as a mother. She was strong enough. She was dedicated enough. Surely, the clan would understand and show mercy?
But they didn't. Harsh whispers and hisses came from the cats hiding around the clearing as the four she-cats carried their precious cargo to the nursery.

"Is that Snowfrost?"

"Why is she wearing a collar?"

"Ew, what's that awful smell?!"

"Where did those kits come from?"

"Are they hers?"
Some seemed to say. Snowfrost's pelt grew hot with embarrassment. Perhaps this transition back into clan life wouldn't be as smooth as she could have hoped.
As the patrol paused in front of the honeysuckle bush, Posytail, the Den Mother, emerged to greet them. She gasped at the sight of the sopping wet kits, beckoning the visitors inside with a swish of her plumed tail. Her own kits, each three moons old, watched on from their nest with curiosity. Posytail gathered some of the wool from the ground, piling it in such a way that it would make the perfect bed for the new mother and kits. Snowfrost practically collapsed on it, a purr rising from her throat. She carefully placed the kit she was holding by her belly, using her tail to guide the little one to suckle. Her helpers placed the remainder of her litter at her side to do the same. Snowfrost bent around to groom each kit until they were dry, before laying back and relaxing in her nest. Relief washed over her, and happiness swelled in her heart. Despite what cats were saying, she was content. Her kits were finally here. Snowfrost was a

mother. It would seem several cats were trying to speak to her, but between her euphoria and exhaustion she had blocked them out, eventually falling into a deep slumber.
A while later, she was brought back to the waking world by a hard prod in the side. Snowfrost hissed as she peeled open her eyes to glare up at the cat who dare wake her. Two Guards; Butterflytail, an arrogant young tom, and Pheasantstripe, Posytail's mate, stood on either side of her. Their expressions were stern, hard as stone.

"Get up," Butterflytail hissed. Snowfrost growled. He tail lashed harshly as she glared up at the rude tom.

"If I move it will wake my kits," she hissed, voice barely above a whisper. Pheasantstripe hit the back of her head with a paw, claws barely sheathed.

"Posytail will keep an eye on them. Now *move*." Pheasantstripe bent down to grab Snowfrost by her kittypet collar, forcing her to her paws. As soon as she stood her kits began to wail, trying their hardest to lift their little heads and blindly search for their mother. Posytail immediately came to their aid, curling her body around them, surrounding the fluffy babies with her paws. Snowfrost pulled back a paw to strike the Den Mother across the muzzle, but was stopped by a hard shove from the lilac she-cat's mate. As Snowfrost was guided from the den, the lynx point molly opted for swatting the other with her tail instead. Posytail hissed with surprise, and a low chuckle rose in the medicine cat's throat.
As they emerged from the nursery, a crowd of Grassclan cats was there once again to greet her. This time, with the rain gone, everyone was out in the open. Snowfrost stared at her clanmates, wide eyed and confused. What were they all gathered together for? Snowfrost turned her gaze forward. Atop Tall Stone stood Whitestar, head and tail raised proudly. A meeting must have been called. But for what? The crowd parted down the middle to give Snowfrost room to walk. The guards who had woken her escorted her down the clear path to Tall Stone's base. Waiting there for her was Redwhisker and Dewpaw, the clan's Code Keeper and his apprentice. Confusion stirred in Snowfrost's mind. *What in the name of the earth and stars is going on?*

"Snowfrost," Whitestar addressed the medicine cat. "Today you are

on trial for crimes against the Land's Star."
What?! Snowfrost drew her ears back in panic, eyes narrowing to slits.
"Dewpaw, address the charges of which she is being held accountable for."

"The cat you see before you has committed several crimes, breaking both Codes in which she has sworn to follow. In the case of the Medicine Cat's Code, Snowfrost has broken the rule: a medicine cat may not have kits until they have a fully trained apprentice."

"Are you really certain those kits are mine? What if I've brought them to the clan after finding them abandoned?" Snowfrost questioned, not willing to completely submit to this ostracization.

"Goldenpaw," Whitestar called, beckoning the pale ginger molly to testify. "Tell the clan what you saw in the meadow."
Goldenpaw seemed to swallow a lump in her throat, eyes fixed on the cats around her. She was trembling, claws kneading into the grassy earth beneath her.

"Jaybird and Ambereye were accompanying me to gather herbs when we stumbled upon Snowfrost. She was laying in the grass, in labor, and in need of assistance. The three of us led her to the old badger set and helped her bare her kits."

"What kits?" Redwhisker asked.

"The four we carried into camp earlier. Three mollies, and a tom." The young molly's tone hushed as she made her reply, voice almost a whisper by the end. Goldenpaw's gaze turned to settle upon her mentor. Guilt glowed in her pale green eyes, silently begging Snowfrost for forgiveness. Snowfrost looked away. Betrayal gripped her heart, squeezing it and puncturing it like a constricting snake. How could her own apprentice turn on her like this?

Dewpaw cleared her throat. "As for the Warrior Code, Snowfrost broke several rules. First, Snowfrost had not recieved approval to take on a mate outside of our clan. Second, she gave up on loyalty to the clan by abandoning it, using the lie of a 'Starclan given quest' to mask her treachery. Third, she allowed herself to be taken in by

Twolegs," she meowed.
Snowfrost's heart dropped. She had no way to dispute the latter two claims. The collar still hanging around her neck was more proof than the clan needed to find her guilty. Though she could try and say she was captured, it would be a hard argument to make given the kits she'd just had. No one would believe she was on a quest if she was pregnant. The reason for her being gone a whole moon was too obvious. But what about the first accusation? Snowfrost had always been so careful when meeting Wolfheart. And Wolfheart made sure to disguise his scent before coming to see her. There was no way the clan could know about their time together. Unless Jaybird told someone about the affair? No, Jaybird was a reliable cat. And she was bound by the Queen's Code. Anything told to her in confidence could not be shared.

"How are you sure that I even had a mate? What if the sire of my litter and I weren't involved?" Snowfrost queried, fur bristling. Whitestar looked down upon the guilty she-cat, darkness in her eyes.

"Days after you had left, a Treeclan tom named Wolfheart came to our camp to speak with me. He asked to join the clan, stating that he wanted to be with his mate and kits. He was shocked to find out the she-cat he had come for had not been present for some time. Wolfheart named that cat to be *you*, Snowfrost."
A range of emotion began to stir inside of Snowfrost. Amongst the feelings of betrayal, guilt, and shame was love; relief, even. Wolfheart was still in love with her. But how was Snowfrost to feel about this? Had he not shown up, there would be less evidence against her treachery of The Codes. Yet Wolfheart doing so proved to her that the tom still had feelings after everything. After leaving her, after taking on a new mate, after having kits with that she-cat. Wolfheart was still hers, even if they were to remain apart.
"

When you told me that you would be leaving, you stated that you were doing so to reconnect with Starclan. Yet it appears that you have not done so. Not only that, but you have come back to us reeking of Twolegs, and bound by your neck with their mark of ownership. Any cat with sight or smell can, at the very least, tell

that." Whitestar continued, the tip of her tail twitching ever so slightly now. The look in her eyes showed annoyance at the medicine cat's pointless counter questions. But the leader's face and body showed calmness. Despite the display of Snowfrost's perfidy, she maintained her composure. Was it because she wasn't surprised? Did she not care? Or did she care more about her image than snapping at the accused molly as anyone else would? These were things that ran through Snowfrost's head as she glared icy daggers at the siamese she-cat.
"All the evidence has now been laid upon us, and now it is time to cast judgement. Redwhisker, what is your conclusion?"

Redwhisker turned from his leader to give his attention to the clan. He stood tall, head raised as he stated the verdict.

"On the charge of one count violation of the Medicine Cat Code, and three counts violation of the Warrior Code, this Code Keeper finds the accused to be guilty."
A murmur echoed through the clan, cheers of agreement rising up from the quiet. Redwhisker turned his head to look at his leader once more.
"I find these to be harsher offenses, worthy of punishments such as a Warriorpaw ceremony, shunning, or possible exil."
A hum came from Whitestar's throat, her brow twisting in thought.

"Goldenpaw, please step forward."

The pale golden she-cat stalked past her clanmates, seating herself a foxlength from Snowfrost. "Yes, Whitestar?" She piped, ears still lowered.

"Is Snowfrost fit to travel?"

"I believe so, Whitestar," Goldenpaw responded.

"Good. Then please accompany myself and Snowfrost to the Moon Cavern," the leader requested. Goldenpaw dipped her head.

"Yes, of course I will."
Whitestar nodded curtly, giving her attention back to the clan.

"A case like this has never happened in Grassclan's remembered history. It is because of this that I must seek guidence from our warrior ancestors, to find the truly proper punishment for Snowfrost." With a jerk of the leader's head, Snowfrost's guards returned to her sides. They pressed against her flanks, ready to keep the trembling she-cat from slipping away. Goldenpaw disappeared into her den for a few moments, returning with several bundles of herbs. She placed one bunch in front of each traveling cat and instructed them to eat. *Traveling herbs, lovely.* Snowfrost grimaced. She never planned on taking these herbs again, and they were no good for her as a nursing queen. She clamped her jaws shut, giving her head a hard shake of refusal. When she did, Whitestar flicked an ear, an order to the guards. Phesantstripe picked up her bundle of herbs while Butterflytail moved to stand behind her. The toms nodded at each other just as a sharp pain shot through Snowfrost's tail. She let out a yowl, followed by a gag. The bitter taste of herbs caught on her tongue as she closed her mouth. Out of reflex she swallowed instead of spitting them out. A low growl rose in her throat as she whipped around to lift her tail. Butterflytail had bit her! Snowfrost whipped back around as she heard Phesantstripe chuckle.

Satisfied, Whitestar led the small patrol out of camp, Snowfrost brought along against her will.

Chapter 11

It was just after sundown when the group made it to the Moon Cavern. Snowfrost's paws ached terribly from the journey. Between the weight she had gained during her pregnancy and the lack of stamina from having lazed around for a whole moon and a half, she had hardly been fit enough to travel. *Perhaps this is another punishment I must endure. Curse Goldenpaw for even thinking that I was well enough to walk this far!*
Whitestar turned around and spoke with the guards; ordering the toms to stand outside the cave to ensure Snowfrost would not run out. Snowfrost snapped out of her bitter thoughts long enough to register this order. She growled as the guards gave her one final shove into the Moon Cavern to follow Whitestar's lead.
The three she-cats crawled through the narrow path which led to the cavern, greeted by glittering light as they emerged into the cave. Snowfrost felt sick as she stepped into the open, freezing cold air surrounding her. She'd never known the Moon Cavern to be chilly, even in the heart of Leaf-bare. The cold must have been for her sake, as Whitestar and Goldenpaw didn't even shiver. Snowfrost felt shame.

"Let's all lay by the Star Willow," Goldenpaw instructed, demonstrating exactly how to rub against the tree's leaves. Snowfost inevitably copied, knowing that she would not be able to dream of her ancestors like the other cats could. Still, sleep came to her as it always did, pulling her into a rich darkness.
When she opened her eyes, Snowfrost was standing in a foggy forest. Howls of pain echoed around her, fearscent and bloodscent flooding her nostrils. Instinct kicked in, driving Snowfrost to stand and look for the injured. There was a battle going on; cats were dying. In a flash, Snowfrost arrived into a clearing. Cats scrambled all around her, crying, yowling, throwing themselves at an unseeable foe. Some lay bleeding on the ground. Others, like the queens and elders, cowered in their dens. In the distance, the black silhouette of a single cat stood out most to Snowfrost. Their fur was long, body lean. Could this be the shadow of one of her kits, all grown up?

The cat seemed to lift her head and cry out "Come and get me you fithly piece of fox-dung!" to the enemy before dashing off. The beast charged after them, and Snowfrost followed suit, feeling a strange pull in her pelt. Like she was meant to witness what would happen next.
In another heartbeat the three of them appeared at a cliff. The brave cat continued to race ahead, despite the obstical in her way. Snowfrost found herself suddenly frozen in place, unable to rush to the other cat's aid. Look out! *Snowfrost tried to yowl, but her voice was trapped inside her throat. The other didn't even seem to notice her presence. And by now, it was too late. The brave warrior had rocketed themself off the edge of the cliff, caught midair by the creature that was pursuing them, and dragged down to the unkown below by gravity.* No! *Snowfrost tried to wail before being thrown back into the waking world.*

Snowfrost woke with a start. Her chest heaved as if she'd just ran here all the way from Oceanclan. Her heart beat just the same; rapid and thunderous. Her gaze was blurry, tears pooling at the corners of her eyes. Was her dream predicting the death of one of her newborns? *Impossible. Starclan does not determin a cat's destiny, they can only predict various outcomes.* And yet, Snowfrost could not shake the feeling that this was a fate set in stone. If she thought it would help, Snowfrost would pray to Starclan that it wouldn't be so. But they were no longer in contact. As far as she knew, Starclan wouldn't even want to hear her pleas. For some reason this made Snowfrost angry. Angrier than she'd ever been before. *This isn't fair...*
Speaking of unfair, Whitestar and Goldenpaw were waking up from their dreams now. They seemed much more calm and rested than Snowfrost did. With a stretch, both mollies rose to their paws, padding over to Snowfrost.

"Has Starclan spoken to you?" Snowfrost asked bitterly. She firced herself into an upright position, giving her chest fur a few vigorous licks. Whitestar answered her with a curt nod.

"Our ancestors have helped me decide what fate you should face. They were merciful, moreso than I thought they'd be."
Surprising, thought Snowfrost.
"With their help, it has been decided that you shall face a Warriorpaw ceremony. Truth be told, I hadn't known medicine cats

could be punished this way."

"And how do you suppose this is going to work out?" Snowfrost growled, rising to her paws. "There are no other trained medicine cats in Grassclan to 'reteach' me. Unless you plan on making me a warrior."

"I will do no such thing. You've chosen to be a medicine cat, I cannot force you into doing another job. However, you are incorrect when you say there are no trained medicine cats in the clan. One stands before you right now." Whitestar gestured to Goldenpaw with her tail, making the younger molly lift her chin a little. Though it was obvious she was suppressing a smile, the young medicine cat's eyes shined with guilt. Snowfrost let out a *mrrow* of laughter.

"*Goldenpaw*? You cannot be serious. She's an apprentice!"

"Not for long." Whitestar turned to face Goldenpaw, lifting her muzzle a little. Her voice echoed clearly off the walls of the Moon Cavern as she spoke. "I, Whitestar, leader of Grassclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help she will serve her Clan for many moons. Goldenpaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan, and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?"

Goldenpaw's mouth hung open a little, surprise and bewilderment showing in her features. Her pale green eyes twinkled like stars as a smile slowly grew on her muzzle at last.

"I-I do..!" She responded with a studder, tail-tip twitching anxiously.

"Then by the powers of StarClan I give you your true name as a medicine cat. Goldenpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Goldensong. Starclan honors your talent and vocalness, and we welcome you as Grassclan's full medicine cat." Whitestar stepped forward to rest her chin on top of Goldensong's head. Goldensong in turn licked the leader's shoulder respectfully. "When we return to camp, I will grant you your head medicine cat's herb," the leader

informed her. Goldensong nodded enthusiastically.

Snowfrost couldn't believe what she had witnessed. Her pelt bristled, eyes narrowed bitterly. "Inconceivable! You cannot possibly believe Starclan will accept this ceremony to be vaild."

"And yet, they have," Whitestar replied, voice sounding monotone, colder than usual. She gave Snowfrost an uncaringbl glance that made the medicine cat's stomach drop into her paws. "They were the ones to instruct me to name Goldensong. The rest of your punishment was left for me to have the final say about once our ancestors gave me their advice."
And with that Whitestar cleared her throat, lifting her head once more.
"I, Whitestar, call upon the spirits of Starclan to look down in shame upon this cat. She has foolishly broken your nobel codes, and I bring her forth to you not as a loyal medicine cat, but as an apprentice once again. From this day forward, until she has earned back her true name, this apprentice shall be known as Snowpaw."
The siamese she-cat lowered her head to look Snowpaw right in the eye as she continued with the ceremony. "Snowpaw, may you learn from your mistakes and properly follow the star paved path that you have been granted to walk upon. You have disgraced our ancestors, and I trust you will try to redeem yourself. For now you will train under Goldensong."
Goldensing stepped up, eyes round with nervousness. She tried to touch noses with her new "apprentice" only to be met with a scoff. Snowpaw turned her muzzle away, drawing her lips back in a snarl. She took a pace from her clanmates, ears lowered.
Whitestar's tail wagged impatiently. She stepped forward and quickly touched Snowpaw's nose in Goldensong's place. With that motion, the ceremony was completed. Snowpaw let out a hiss, which made Goldensong shrink in place. Whitestar, however, stood strong.
"Come, you two. We should return back to camp." She prompted, turning towards the exit. Goldensong raced after, practically pressing herself into the other molly's side as they headed through the tunnel. Snowpaw knew she was afraid. Most likely she didn't want to face the wrath of her new apprentice. Though Snowpaw was more than ready to give Goldensong a piece of her mind, with

or without Whitestar there to bare witness. But when she opened her mouth to spit out her displease, no words seemed to find their way from her throat. Instead, Snowpaw growled. There was no use wasting her breath now. Insults and cries of injustice would not undo that which had already been done. She was an apprentice again. She had to accept that, even if she felt humiliated by it. If this was the sacrifice she'd have to make for her kits to live within the Land's Star then so be it. Snowpaw lingered within the Moon Cavern for a few moments more, apprehensive about returning to the clan. But she knew if she didn't leave soon the guards would come in to drag her out against her will. So Snowpaw finally padded after her clanmates, tail and head lowered in shame.

Chapter 12

Warm dawn light filtered in the sky as Snowpaw, Whitestar, and Goldensong emerged from the Moon Cavern. Even after all these moons it amazed Snowpaw that time seemed to fly by when one slept inside the cave. Though sleeping certainly helped with that. And the nightmare... Snowpaw shook her out her pelt, trying to keep her mind off of her mysterious dream. She didn't want to dissect it right now. Instead she gave her attention to the cats around her. The ones that would help carry out her punishment. Butterflytail and Pheasantstripe stood at attention as Whitestar addressed them. They looked tired, with eyes droopy and fur ruffled from the cold mountain wind. They'd been up all night waiting around while their leader spoke with Starclan. By now the toms would be dismissed and sent off for a well deserved rest. But their job wasn't finished yet. They still had to guard Snowpaw; at least until they returned back to camp. Snowpaw silently hoped one or both of them would fall off their paws with fatigue, if only to give her some space. She really needed it right now. Besides, it wasn't as if she were planning on sneaking away or attacking anyone. She would cooperate with her ongoing humiliation, if it meant getting it all over with quicker. She didn't need guards. Despite this, no cat was willing to take the risk. The toms were watching Snowpaw closely, even as Whitestar gave them their orders.

"Pheasantstripe, please help me remove Snowpaw's collar," the leader requested. Phesantstripe nodded agreeably, while Butterflytail visibly held back a snicker. *He's laughing at my name*, Snowpaw realized bitterly.
Whitestar rounded the newly named "apprentice", waiting for her father to set himself at Snowpaw's other side. Then, they grabbed hold of her kittypet collar. Each tugged in their own direction, biting full force into the fabric. Snowpaw gagged and stumbled as she was pulled this way and that, until finally the collar tore in half. Her bell bounced on the ground with one last chime until it settled in the dust at her paws. The leader and warrior spit out the remenents that'd come undone in their mouthes. Snowpaw was at

last free from the Twoleg's hold; but at what cost?

"Now you can start your life among the clans fresh," Whitestar meowed to the medicine cat, lifting a paw to swiftly tidy her whiskers. Then she turned to her other clanmates. "Pheasantstripe, Goldensong, Butterflytail, please go ahead without us. I must speak with Snowpaw alone for a moment."
Butterflytail moved to make an argument, but Whitestar silenced him with an assertive swish of her tail. The guards exchanged glances, then turned, doing as they were told. Goldensong padded along behind them, sparing a brief glance over her shoulder as they left.
When the three cats had disappeared over the horizon, Whitestar turned to Snowpaw.

"You should find yourself lucky that I am letting you stay in the clan," she growled through an eerily calm face, glancing down at the collar by her paws. Her voice was soft, but there was hostility laced within her mew. "But you do not deserve those kits. The way you went about the circumstance was uncalled for. If you would have just *waited* no one would find fault in your decision to become a mother. But you *lied*. You abandoned your clan. You falsified a quest for Starclan! How could you possibly believe you could get away with this?"
Snowpaw did not respond, finding the earth beneath her paws more interesting than speaking up for herself. She turned her head away, not wanting Grassclan's leader to even look upon her face. But the siamese she-cat went on, her voice growing louder.
"Why didn't you stay with the Twolegs? If you had stayed in Twolegplace, you would not be facing such humiliation. Your kits would be better off there, at least. If you wanted to return to Grassclan so badly, it would have been better if you left them."

"Tell me," Snowpaw finally spoke, "would you want your kits to grow up in Twolegplace, if you had any? Even if you were to become a kittypet, knowing how wonderful life in the clan is, would you keep that from them?"

Whitestar hesitated for a heartbeat. "No...I suppose not."

"Then why fault me for what I thought to be best for my kits? I

came back for their sake, not my own," Snowpaw tried to reason.

Whitestar's eyes darkened. "You know *Starclan* will find fault in them, don't you? Not just for your crimes, but because of the circumstances of their conception? You realize bringing them back here condemns them to a much shorter life? Or one that may end painfully? Perhaps your kits will be happier in Grassclan, but this was not the best choice for them."

Snowpaw suddenly turned, pelt bristling and teeth bared. She was only a paw-length length from Whitestar's face. "I'd rather they live short fulfilled lives as warriors than let them live long as fat lazy kittypets! You have *no* right to judge the way I want my litter to be raised."
Whitestar took a step back in surprise, shoulder fur rising. She seemed to feel threatened. *Good*, Snowpaw caught herself thinking almost joyously.

"Whitestar!" Butterflytail called, peaking over the horizon. Whitestar looked all too relieved to see the handsome tabby return. He must have hung back to wait for them.

"We're coming!" She called back, voice raising slightly with eagerness. "Come, Snowpaw. Grassclan will wonder what's become of us if we stay here too long."
Would that really be so bad? Snowpaw wondered with slight discontent. After thinking for a heartbeat, though, she quickly changed her mind. Even if she were about to face mockery at the paws of her clanmates, at least she would be safe at home with her kits. They were what mattered now. Snowpaw found her paws pricking eagerly as she hurried after Whitestar, heart beat quickening the closer they drew to camp. All Snowpaw wanted to do now was curl up in the nursery with her litter and sleep for half a moon. She was excited to finally have some time to spend with her newborns.
When the patrol finally returned home, the clan was there eagerly waiting to hear news. "*What would be Snowfrost's fate?"*, they all must be wondering. Whitestar climbed to the peak of Tall Stone while Butterflytail and Pheasantstripe made their way to the warrior's den. Slugsnout and Ambereye walked over to take their place as Snowpaw settled herself in the center of the clearing.

Perhaps it would be wiser for her to tuck herself away with her kits. But Snowpaw knew Whitestar would want her to remain outdoors until the meeting concluded. Besides, her new guards would have likely dragged her back into the clearing if she tried to walk away. Though she was anxious to return to her little ones, the lynx point molly resigned herself to be patient and wait out the show. Snowpaw heaved a sigh as the clan gathered around the ancient boulder as Whitestar called; "Let all cats old enough to travel through the meadow gather here beneath the Tall Stone for a clan meeting." The leader waited a few moments more as everyone settled in before she began. "Cats of Grassclan, I return to you baring the verdict of Starclan. Our ancestors have been merciful towards our medicine cat this day. They have spoken their approval of us keeping our eldest healer in the clan, but at the cost of her name. In her place, our ancestors granted me the power to promote Goldenpaw so that she may be our head medicine cat. From this point on, she will be known as Goldensong."

"Goldensong! Goldensong! Goldensong!" The clan cheered.

"Goldensong will be responsible for watching over Snowpaw and reintegrating her into our society. Only when she deems her ready will this healer-turned-apprentice be renamed. We qre to treat Snowpawas we would any other clanmate otherwise. She is no longer in need of guards." Whitestar looked to Ambereye and Slugsnout, nodding her head to dismiss them. Ambereye heaved a sign of relief, getting up and walking to her mate, Jaybird. And Slugsnout shrugged, moving along to join their brother somewhere in the crowd.

"And what about the kits?" Ashwhisker piped.

"Yes, if Snowpaw is an apprentice now, are we still allowed to grant her access to the nursery to raise them? Or has that been left for me to decide?" Posytail chimed in.

"That is a very difficult decision to make. However, I did consider it on the journey back home. Normally, I would advocate in favor of the new parent. However, given the circumstances of which these kits were born, and Snowpaw's Code breaking, I believe it may be safest for a queen to raise the kits."

Rosebloom growled. "Does that mean we're keeping them? Surely it would be best to send those kits back to Twolegplace where they belong?"

"I agree!" Yowled the elder, Boulderfall. "Those kits will bring nothing but misfortune to our clan if we raise them. They are cursed!"
Murmurs of agreement rippled through the throng of cats surrounding Snowpaw, striking fear into her heart.

Whitestar raised her tail, demanding silence from her warriors. "The kits are too young to be taken on a journey to the Twolegplace. I have decided Grassclan will raise them at least until their first moon. By then, I will have made a decision on whether or not they shall remain. For now, I would like to assign Jaybird to act as their guardian. And Ashwhisker, now that your litter is beginning to be weaned, will you share your milk with them?"

"Gladly," Ashwhisker responded, dipping his head. Jaybird stepped up beside him, peaking around his shoulder to make eye contact with Snowpaw. It had been some time since the silver tabby queen had raised young kits. But Dewpaw had grown into a fine young cat, so Snowpaw felt assured that her kits would be safe in her sister's care. Besides, it was only for a moon. If they were allowed to stay, Snowpaw planned to request to take over raising them. And if Whitestar decided the kits were to be exiled, then Snowpaw would go with them. She'd bring them back with her to Misty's den. Even with her betrayal towards the kittypet, Snowpaw was sure the fluffy molly would accept her back with open paws. Especially with her little ones in tow. Jaybird searched Snowpaw's expression, as if she was seeking her littermate's approval. Snowpaw gave her a small nod and a smile, bringing her sister visible relief.

"Thank you. There is only one thing I have left to say about this matter. No cat is to share what has happened this moon. No one outside of Grassclan should learn of Snowpaw's kits, or what has become of her as a medicine cat. To others, she will remain Snowfrost. And we will show cats how *grateful* we are to have her return from her journey to connect with our ancestors."

Though the clan looked less than pleased with this command, none

spoke out against Whitestar's orders. They nodded, exchanging wary glances, while some shot Snowpaw a glare. Did the clan believe this was for her protection? *Whitestar's doing this to save face*, Snowpaw understood. *She doesn't want Grassclan to look weak or irresponsible because of me.* For some reason, this made Snowpaw's fur prickle with irritation. Did Whitestar truly believe one cat could ruin how the rest of the Land's Star saw Grassclan as a whole?
"That is all for now," Whitestar concluded. "Meeting dismissed."
At once, Snowpaw rushed over to speak with the clan leader. Though she was annoyed, she wasn't here to make comments on Whitestar's decisions.

"Whitestar. Would it be wrong of me to request just one more day with my kits?" She asked, trying to sound as pleasant as possible. "I understand the decision that you have made. But they are still mine. Shouldn't I have the chance to spend some time with them?"

Whitestar thought for a moment. "You haven't gotten the chance to be alone with them yet, have you?"

"No," Snowpaw confessed.

For another heartbeat Whitestar was silent before she finally let out a thoughtful hum. "Very well. You have until moon high to share their nest. After, you must move back to the medicine den without them. Is that clear?"

Snowpaw perked up, eyes twinkling with excitement. She hadn't expected for Whitestar to agree so easily. "Yes! T..thank you!" Snowpaw stammeted gratefully, mentally striking herself for sounding like some newly named apprentice. Whitestar smiled at her politely, turning to retreat into the warmth of her den. Snowpaw did the same, rushing into the nursery as quickly as her paws could carry her.
The kits were in the nest where she had left them, piled on top of one another, sound asleep. The silver and white kit dominated the pile, laying on top of her siblings with a smile on her face. Below her were her sisters who held each other close in their sleep. And at the bottom of the pile was the only tom, who seemed content with being chosen as the base of the kitten pyramid. Snowpaw purred as she looked at them, carefully tiptoing her way into the wool to curl

her body around them. As she settled, the four little balls of fur seemed to pick up on her presence. The tomkit mewled out, encouraging his sisters to do the same. They crawled, searching the nest for the warmth of the older she-cat. Snowpaw purred louder, leading them to her belly to suckle with a sweep of her tail. The little ones wiggled closer to their mother, latching onto her without much coaxing. Snowpaw lowered her head, grooming each one as they fed. She buried her nose into their fur once they were clean, drinking in their fresh scents. She barely noticed when Ashwhisker entered the den. Even his judgemental stare could not pull her away from her litter. She was obsessed with them; completely in love. Nothing would ever take that from her.

"You're all going to grow up into wonderful cats," she whispered to them, knowing they could not hear her words. "You will be clever and strong; kind to those you care for and fierce against every opponent. And no matter what happens, you will always be loved." Then she snuggled her kittens closer to herself. "I will always be here for you. Even if I have to love you from afar." Snowpaw hoped that her little ones would understand; that one day they would come to know her words were true. She would do anything for them.

A blissful silence fell over the den. The sounds of the outside world were hidden by the dense walls of the honeysuckle bush. And Ashwhisker, despite his look of displeasure, said nothing to Snowpaw as she bonded with her newborns. He managed to keep his own trio of kits quiet when the tired new mother decided to take a nap. And when she woke, Snowpaw watched as the three of them played quietly on their side of the den. Snowpaw purred at the sight. In a moon or so, her own kittens would start tumbling around like that. She could already imagine the mischief they would get into. If they were allowed to stay in camp. Snowpaw sighed softly. The last thing she wanted to think about was her kits being sent away. But it was something important to consider. The majority of the clan were angered by their presence here. They would probably be happier with the kits gone. But Snowpaw would do whatever should could to convince the clan that they should be kept. For the next moon, Snowpaw swore that she'd do everything in her power to show Grassclan that the kits belonged. But what if she was unsuccessful? Then they would all have to return to Misty.

And all of the sacrifices Snowpaw had made would have been for nothing.

Snowpaw growled quietly at the thought, forcing herself to put her focus onto her kits. She hadn't yet taken the time to study them, to learn more about the little lives she had brought into the world. By now the four of them were awake, wiggling their way around the nest with high pitched mewls; an effort of commutation between one another. The loudest of the kits was the silver and white tabby. She cried out, blindly chasing after her brother. Between her mews, Snowpaw could hear a purr rumbling in the tiny mollykit's chest. Meanwhile her brother seemed much more grumpy. He whined, turning to bat a tiny paw in his sister's direction. He missed, of course, but that didn't stop him from trying to strike her again. The youngest of the litter, the pale silver mollykit, laid back quietly against Snowpaw's belly, her nose lifted as if she were keeping up with the action by scent alone. And the final kit of the litter acted as if she wanted nothing to do with her littermates. Snowpaw watched her make her way around the nest, drawing closer to its edges. Without so much as a meep, the tiny silver and white kit pulled herself onto the nursery floor, already prepared to explore the world around her. Snowpaw tutted, grabbing her before she could get much farther. She placed the kitten in front of her, lowering her head to give her a few licks. But before she made contact, Snowpaw paused, staring down at the young molly between her paws. This kitten's fur stood out to her the most from her littermates. It was nearly gray, although it held more of Snowpaw's silvery sheen. And her white accents appeared in almost the same exact places as her father's. *Wolfheart...* Snowpaw's heart ached from the likeness. At the reminder of her lost love. A pit began to form in her stomach the longer she stared down at her daughter. It was a strange sensation. Snowpaw knew that she held a great love for this little one. And yet, for a heartbeat, it felt almost burdensome to feel that way. Was it because of the kit's resemblance to Wolfheart that she could not bring herself to care for it the way she did the others? Snowpaw hated to admit it, but... She shook her head roughly, growling to herself yet again. What a ridiculous thought! Of course she cared about her kitten. But it was so painful to do so. How could she, after all, when the kitten wore her ex-lover's face? The face of the tom who had broken Snowpaw's heart to pieces time and time again.

Snowpaw looked away from the kit now, shame burning beneath her pelt like a flame. She was disappointed in herself. Disappointed for allowing her feelings for Wolfheart to come between herself and her baby. She was angry with herself for falling for a cat like him. And miserable for all the pain she was enduring because of it. What was Snowpaw to do with the constant reminder of her failures living with her in physical form? She'd never neglect her kit, that was unthinkable. But Snowpaw couldn't bring herself to find the strength to want this kitten as much as she wanted the others. Snowpaw would fight with tooth and claw to protect her kits, but it didn't feel as worth it to defend this one. A sick feeling curdled her stomach now, which only served to worsen all of her negative emotions. Snowpaw shut her eyes, willing them all away. She just wanted some peace with her kits. That's all she wanted...

"Snow?"
Snowpaw's eyes shot open at the sound of her name. She looked up, blinking at the two she-cats who'd come to visit her nest.
"It's moon high- Say, are...are you alright?" Jaybird asked.

Snowpaw held her sister's gaze for a quiet heartbeat, willing all of her emotions away so that she might find the strength to respond.
"I'm...I'm fine," she finally managed to choke out.

"Good," Posytail cut in, stepping forward from Jaybird's side. "Then you don't mind us coming in to take the kits now?"

"W-what...?" Snowpaw stammered. On instinct she herded her kits to her belly, hiding them beneath her plumed tail.

"You had an agreement with Whitestar didn't you? You had until moon high to be with your kits. And now it's time to transfer them to Jaybird's nest."

"No," Snowpaw nearly sobbed. "Please. Just give me a little more time with them..!"

"I'm sorry, Snow," Jaybird mewed softly, lowering her muzzle. She looked guilty. Like somehow this was her fault. "But we have to...You'll see them again soon."

Snowpaw once again stared at the mollies in front of her. She didn't want to give her kits up yet. But she had an agreement. And Snowpaw knew she couldn't go back on it. Reluctantly she moved her tail, allowing Posytail to step into the nest and grab ahold of her kits. She took the silver and white kit first. Then Jaybird came over and picked up Snowpaw's son. The queens returned a couple heartbeats after, retrieving the final two kits. And when they were all settled in, Posytail returned once more, an unreadable expression on her face.

"You have to leave now," she told the medicine cat curtly. Her voice was flat, like she was purposely hiding her feelings in order to complete her task. Snowpaw could tell. No matter how hard Posytail may try, Snowpaw could see the indignation flaring in her eyes. "Your mentor is waiting for you."

Snowpaw hesitated in the nest she laid in. Abandoning it felt like a crime. But her kits weren't inside of it anymore. There was nothing keeping her here. And yet she felt compelled to stay. She could still smell them. She could hear their mewls. They were crying for her. Snowpaw glanced over at where her sister laid, trying to steal one last glance of them. Posytail growled; a sign that her patience was being tested. Snowpaw knew she couldn't hang around any longer. And so with a heavy heart, Snowpaw pushed herself to her paws. She skulked miserably out of the den, across the moon bathed clearing, and into the medicine den where her real punishment would soon begin.

Chapter 13

It was early in the morning when Snowpaw's lessons picked up. Two days had already passed since her punishment began. And during that time she found herself being subjected to the humiliation of "basic training." Kit stuff like what herbs were used for what ailments, and proper cat anatomy. It was knowledge Snowpaw had drilled into her head seasons ago by her original mentor, Softpetal. The older medicine cat had been a stickler for that sort of thing. *"If you can't remember something so simple then you have no place being a healer"*, Snowpaw recalled Softpetal repeating on numerous occasions. Back then, the lynx point molly had made it her mission to memorize everything within just two moons' time. And with experience, the knowledge soon felt like obvious information. So having it all retaught to her now felt redundant; ridiculous even. Goldensong knew that Snowpaw understood it already. *She* was the one who taught it to her for Starclan's sake! But Snowpaw knew that Goldensong was only "doing her job". Still, after two day of this, Snowpaw's patience had been worn thin.

"-And blackberry leaf is used for bee stings," Goldensong babbled on, showing off a pile of the small, rough edged herbs. Then she moved her paw, gesturing to another herb to explain it's usage. Snowpaw growled in frustration.

"For Silverpelt's sake, Goldensong, would you stop this already?" She snapped, interrupting the young medicine cat.

Goldensong let out a tiny meep of surprise at the interruption. "What are you talking about? I'm teaching you the same way you taught me. You want me to stop..? Am I doing it wrong?"

Snowpaw huffed "No. But how about we stop acting like a couple of mouse-brains and skip to the more advanced lessons instead? Because this is infuriating! I feel as stupid as newborn listening to you praddle on about the use of herbs. As if it isn't something that's second nature to me at this point."

Goldensong held her gaze for a heartbeat. At first her expression was full of pain. And then, like the tides, her mood shifted. Her brows furrowed and her voice became tainted by seriousness. "Fine then, if that's what you want... Gather some borage from the stores. We're going to take them to Jaybird to help her milk come."
Snowpaw took an immediate pause upon receiving this instruction. They were going to visit the nursery today? Snowpaw hadn't been allowed in since she'd come home from the Moon Cavern. As she moved to search through the medicine stores, she began to question Goldensong's reasoning for this task. Was it to rub sand in her wounds; to remind Snowpaw that she was being punished? Or was this the golden molly's way of calming her agitated mentor-turned-apprentice? Snowpaw was unsure. But in her heart she hoped it was the latter. Goldensong wasn't a malicious cat, even when someone was rude to her. She always favored the good things, rather than lingering on the bad. Snowpaw believed that was the young molly's only shining quality as a medicine cat. Although she'd never admit it aloud.
Shortly after, as the healers made their way to the nursery, Snowpaw's thoughts began to run through her mind like frenzied rabbits. She wondered how much her kits had grown in such a short time. Were they more active? Had their fur grown in any? Were they attempting to open their eyes yet? These were all important things she hoped to not miss. She was already losing such vital time with her kittens. Missing out on milestones felt like a tragedy.
The medicine cat's arrival seemed more welcomed than Snowpaw had originally anticipated. Jaybird was the only queen awake, while Ashwhisker and Mallowlight continued to sleep alongside their litters. Lilacbreeze had probably gone on the dawn patrol, and Posytail and her kits were out for their usual morning walk. This made the nursery very peaceful. And it would make Snowpaw's job here much more simple. Goldensong gestured to Jaybird, prompting her warriorpaw apprentice to step up and feed the queen her herbs.

"Good morning, Goldensong. Hello, Snow." Jaybird greeted with a soft smile. Snowpaw said nothing as she passed on the borage, putting her focus onto the sleeping kittens nestled against her sister's belly.

"Good morning! How is everything today?" Goldensong chirped,

leaning down to give the newborns a sniff. Snowpaw took a step back to give her "mentor" some space, eyeing her as she went about her business. *I've already looked over the kits. They smell healthy. And they're certainly being well fed. They're a strong bunch, just like Wolfheart and I are.*

"The kits are all doing well. Sadly I've still been unable to produce milk for them. I feel like I'm driving Ashwhisker batty by asking him to nurse them," Jaybird admitted as she licked up the borage, chewing them throughly with a sour look on her muzzle.

"Oh I'm sure it's no trouble," Goldensong assured. "It's the responsibility of every queen to ensure the kits are fed. Besides, it should only take a couple more days for your milk to come. We'll up the borage dosage to be taken twice a day, just to be sure."
Snowpaw blocked out whatever else the two she-cats were discussing once she noticed her kits start to rouse. They wiggled backwards then stuck their little noses into the air, sniffing determinedly. Once they recognized whatever scent they had caught hold of, the four of them began to wail. Snowpaw's heart lurched; her instincts flared back up, urging her to plunge forward and settle her little ones. She could feel her body trembling as she fought against herself. Deep down she knew that her kits were crying out for her. But logic told Snowpaw to keep her distance. She didn't want to cause trouble, even if it hurt to let her kittens cry.
Jaybird lowered her head to them, doing her best to quiet the fussy bunch with soft purrs and licks. After a short while, the four of them began to calm down, and Snowpaw sighed with relief. A jolt ran across her spine as she felt something brush against her flank. Snowpaw glanced over, meeting the concerned gaze of Goldensong.
"You're tearing up. Are you alright?" The golden molly signed, not wanting to draw Jaybird's attention with her question. Snowpaw blinked, lifting a paw up to her cheek to wipe away the tears she hadn't known were falling. She stared at her wet paw for a heartbeat before nodding numbly.
"We must be going now, Jaybird," Goldensong informed the queen, nudging Snowpaw ahead of herself toward the den's exit. "We'll be back with more herbs in the evening."
Jaybird lifted her head, tilting it a little. "Oh. Alright. Well, I'll see you later then. Thank you both so much!"

Goldensong nodded curtly to the queen, following Snowpaw back out into the clearing.
Snowpaw padded a tail-length ahead, her head lowered slightly, tail dragging along the earth behind her.
"You did well today," Goldensong spoke to her softly as she caught up, brushing her tail against the older she-cat's flank. This time, the lynx point molly felt comfort from the younger molly's touch. "You were very strong in there."
Snowpaw said nothing in response. She didn't know how to feel right now.
"Come along. I think we should go out into the meadow and gather some supplies next."

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In the following days, Snowpaw was made to deliver more borage to Jaybird. Whether or not this was a punishment or an act of kindness on Goldensong's part was still unclear. Regardless, it granted Snowpaw a chance to visit her kits, and that was all that mattered to her in the end. She got to track their growth, and ensure their health.
In their fourth day of life, the little ones had begun to grow more active. They tested their tiny limbs, using them to push their stubby bodies around with all the strength each could muster. Standing was attempted on occasion, although none of them were stable enough to stay on their paws for long. Frequently, they'd call out to each other as they blindly explored their nest, as if keeping track of one another, or communicating. The bravest of the kits, the silver and white molly, was always wriggling off towards places she didn't belong. Under Jaybird's rump, or getting tangled in the wool, and sometimes even tripping up her siblings. It was an amusing sight. But Snowpaw wished it was any of her other kits who would behave this way. Out of all the litter, why was it Wolfheart's look-a-like who had to act so much like him as a young cat? As hard as Snowpaw tried to focus on each of her kittens equally, she always found her attention being brought back to her silver and white daughter. The sight of her was still enough to bring Snowpaw to tears. How was she to go about her days knowing a copy of her ex would always be sleeping a den away?
By the kits' fifth day of life, the four little bundles of fur had begun
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to fluff up. Their eyes, once sealed tight, now bunched and squinted, warning the lynx point molly that soon they would be able to see. And their tiny squeaks began to turn into slightly more coherent sounds; their first attempts at speech. The tom was the first to let out a sound less like a mew and more like the word "ma". His sisters tried their best to mimic his noise, but only the silver and white kit was able to succeed. Unlike the tomkit, however, the little molly had not spoken the word into the air absently. Instead, she'd used the word while kneading Jaybird.

"Ma," she purred, pushing her tiny white paws against the silver queen's belly. "Ma, ma, ma, ma, ma."

At first, Jaybird had found the attempt amusing. But once she'd gotten a glance of Snowpaw's face, she quickly changed her tune. Snowpaw could hear her sister chiding the little one softly, attempting to correct her thinking. But young kits could not be reasoned with, and this kit in particular was adamant about the lable she'd placed upon her aunt.

All Snowpaw could see was red. Her ears were ringing, and her veins felt like they had been flooded with icewater. Why was her kit calling Jaybird by that name? Who in the nursery was encouraging the kits to see her as their mother? Snowpaw was livid. She could barely contain her upset. She couldn't even bare to stay in the nursery anymore; not after this. With a harsh lash of her tail, the lynx point molly fled the den, rushing back to her own to cry in her nest. Snowpaw so desperately wanted her kits to know *her* as their mother. To love her and bond with her, just as they were meant to. But Snowpaw was missing out on such precious time with them. And it didn't help that her connection to them felt strained, with Wolfheart's look-a-like driving her away. What was Snowpaw to do? For a long while, the lynx point molly wept in her nest, thinking, trying to figure out something she could do. Then, in an instant, an idea settled in her mind.

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The rain began to fall hard against the forest floor as Snowpaw went on her way. The branches of the trees were nearly bare in the change of seasons, allowing more water to make it to the ground. For a good while, the only sounds which echoed through the woods were the patter of raindrops and an occasional clap of thunder. At
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least until Snowpaw's kit began to wail.
The lone she-cat traveled far beyond her familiar territory, getting lost in the deep forested area of Treeclan. Though the clan did not take kindly to trespassers, Snowpaw found herself hardly worried about getting caught. She was still a medicine cat, technically. She could still travel across borders as she pleased as long as it was for a just cause. Giving a lone kit a good home seemed like a perfectly good reason to trespass to her.
What Snowpaw did worry about however was the newborn herself. It was hard enough traveling through unfamiliar grounds alone, but it was a whole other experience carrying around such precious cargo. Snowpaw's maternal instincts were still very strong, despite the seperation from her litter and the herbs she had started to take to prevent her milk from coming. Every noise spooked the poor she-cat. The wind blowing the wrong way caused her to involuntary growl. Snowpaw felt ready to strike at anything that dare threaten her now. She would fight all of Tigerclan if it meant protecting this tiny scrap of fur, even if she couldn't bare to look at it. Even if she disowned it like she planned. Soon, she would not have to carry the burden of protecting this kit anymore. If only she could find her way to Wolfheart already. Where was she? How far was she from camp?
A scent traveling on the wind stopped the she-cat in her tracks. A row of blackthorn bushes opened up ahead of her in the inky darkness. A flash of lightning illuminated them temporarily, revealing their identity. This was the barrier which protected Treeclan's camp. She had made it! Now Snowpaw wondered how she was supposed to get past the thorny wall. But before she could try to get in, she had to hide the kit. Thinking would be much easier without having a fussy little one to disturb her planning. The lynx point molly turned around and walked away from the bushes for a few heartbeats to look for a good hiding spot. A foxlengths away she spotted a maple tree with a hollowed out trunk. The hole within it was not too big, yet it was the perfect size to serve the purpose she needed it for. Carefully she placed her tiny silver kitten inside, mewing a soft promise to return. The kit let out a tiny cry, wriggling half blindly in the hole. In response Snowpaw purred, licking her a few times to help quiet the kitten back down. Once she grew still, Snowpaw walked back to the blackthorns.
As she made her way around the barrier, Snowpaw searched for the

camp entrance. She eventually came across an elm tree which reeked of clan scent. This had to be the way in. The tree's low branches made easy access for any skilled climber to come and go. But the she-cat was terrible at climbing, especially with her belly still pudgy from pregnancy. She had to find another way in. She continued walking along the thorny wall until she came across a new smell, one even more familiar to her. Excitement flooded her senses and she carelessly rushed towards it. On the other side of the blackthorns, she spotted the cat she had come to see, making dirt. She hesitated a moment before calling to him.
"Wolfheart!" she mewed softly. At the sound of his name the tom's attention turned towards her, eyes flashing green in the darkness. He stared for a moment through the bushes before turning away, only to return a moment later, jumping down from a tree. He stood in front of the she-cat, head held high. His usual long flowing coat was soggy from the rain, clinging to his sides revealing him to be thinner than normal. Leaf-fall was coming to a close, giving way to a harsh Leafbare. It was clear to see the tom was already suffering from it, and the she-cat could only imagine what the rest of his clan looked like.

"What are you doing here?" Wolfheart challenged, his voice harsh and low. Snowpaw took a step closer to him, unintimidated.

"I need to show you something. Come with me." She sounded desperate, Snowpaw knew she did. But in this moment she couldn't bring herself to care.
Wolfheart hesitated a moment as the molly began to walk off. She looked back at him, beckoning him with a wave of her plumed tail. He let out a soft sign, padding after her back to the maple tree. Snowpaw poked her head into the hole in its trunk, pulling out her kit. She turned around and carefully dropped her at Wolfheart's paws.
"She's yours," the lynx-point molly told him, her voice monotone. Wolfheart bent down to sniff at the kit. He nudged her gently with his muzzle, causing her to stir. The kitten let out a tiny squeal, attempting to lift her head. She wiggled in Wolfheart's direction, obviously cold from the rain. Sympathy seem to overtake the tom as he cupped the kit with his paw, guiding her into the shelter of his warm belly fur.

"Snowfrost, where have you been all this time?" He asked, taking his attention off the kit for the time being.
Snowpaw growled, averting his steady green gaze. For a moment, she was silent. There was so much she wanted to say--that she *needed* to say--yet she could not convince herself to bring up any of it.

"...Why do you care?" She asked, voice soft but laced with attitude. She glanced away, feeling a sudden annoyance with the tom.

"Because I still care about you," Wolfheart responded, sitting down on the damp, leaf littered ground. "Don't you know whats been going on for the past moon and a half?"
Snowpaw narrowed her eyes, lashing her tail, but she did not respond.
"I told Blazestar about our affair. I told my whole clan about it. I was made an apprentice again," Wolfheart confessed, his green eyes brimming with sadness.

"You're an apprentice..?" Snowpaw gasped, her eyes snapping back to look at the tom with fake astonishment. She'd already known of Wolfheart's fate. Though she was surprised that he would confess it to her. Part of Snowpaw was relieved. Now she could tell Wolfheart all about what had happened to her, too. About the trial, about her being named an apprentice again. As she was about to part her jaws to speak, Wolfheart shook his head.

"I was just made a warrior again yesterday. I went through so much humiliation. But I did it all for you, and our children. After the Warriorpaw ceremony, I left. I went to Grassclan to help you raise our kits. But when I got there, Whitestar told me you had gone. She said you were on a journey to reconnect with Starclan. But I know that had to have been a lie. Where did you go?"

Snowpaw lowered her ears, staring at Wolfheart for a moment before finding the right words to say. "I went to Twolegplace. I did what you told me to," she lied. "Our kits are in the care of the Twolegs now. I realized you were right. It's for their own good. *Our* own good. I left to live in Twolegplace long enough to have the kits. But I couldn't bare to leave all of them." Snowpaw felt bad, not being able to tell Wolfheart the truth. But it was for her own

protection, and his. What if their kits really were going to end up as kittypets? If she told Wolfheart that they were in Grassclan, it would give the tom hope. Hope that neither of them could afford to hold onto at this time. Not with how disappointed their clans were with them.
Snowpaw shook her head a little, hardly noticeable. Then she stepped forward, nudging the kit closer to him. "She reminded me a lot of you. I wanted her to meet her father." Snowpaw gave the little kit a few licks before stepping away. "Please, Wolfheart. Take her." She stared at the grey and white tom, blue eyes pleading. She didn't want to have to see this kit anymore, to look into her face and see her father. Snowpaw knew the kit would be better off in Treeclan, Starclan only knew how the rest of her litter was going to be treated. Wolfheart stared at Snowpaw only for a moment before glancing down at the kit.
"I'll take her," he finally decided. Snowpaw trilled, bumping her forehead against his in gratitude before stepping back again.

"Thank you," she sighed, relieved by his decision. "I know she will be in good paws. She is all yours now, Wolfheart, I won't interfere in her life. I know where my place is. I'm a medicine cat, not a mother." The words felt like poison slipping past her lips, burning her tongue and numbing her mouth. Snowpaw wouldn't let Wolfheart see how much it upset her, though deep inside her heart was breaking. All the lies she had told, just for these little scraps of fur she had kitted. Were they really worth it? For a moment, Snowpaw began to fall for her own lies. But before she could think more about it, she was interrupted by the grey and white tom speaking.

"Regardless of whether or not you want to be a part of this kit's life, my clan would never allow you to be. And that's because of the mistakes we've made. So, if I can help it, the clan will never know that this kit wasn't Treeclan born at all." As if to prove his vow, Wolfheart bent his head down to groom the kit's fur backwards to warm her. In return the kit purred, clearly appreciating the gesture. A look of love instantly shined in the tom's pale green eyes, and Snowpaw was reassured that he would be an excellent father, just as she had always known. *As long as Wolfheart cares for this kit, I don't think I'll have any problems with letting her go.* Though her heart

ached, Snowpaw knew this was the best option for them all.
"It's almost morning, the warriors will be rousing soon. They won't take kindly to you wandering onto Treeclan territory," Wolfheart suddenly warned. Snowpaw's ears pricked, head tilting upward to look at the sky. On the horizon the very faintest amount of light began to shine, even from behind the dark clouds that still hung overhead. With a heavy heart, Snowpaw realized she must say goodbye to her ex-mate and his look-a-like kit.

"You're right," the lynx point molly agreed. She walked up to him to briefly touch her nose to his. Wolfheart looked into her eyes as he bent down to pick the kit up in his jaws gently. As she had done to him, Snowpaw touched her nose to the mollykit's, knowing that though she may see this little bundle again someday-all grown up-the kit would never know her true origins. But it was for the best, Snowpaw couldn't have this kitten around-an almost perfect copy of Wolfheart-to remind her of her failed relationship, her mistake, and her other kits. Standing up straight, she turned around, taking one last look back at the two cats before running off into the storm and back to the meadow.
Just as she'd done the night she informed Wolfheart of her pregnancy, Snowpaw ran. She pelted across the soaked meadow fields as fast as her long limbs could carry her. She had to get away. She *needed* to get away. If she stayed she may change her mind and take the kit back. And then what? Sure that kit would have a harder time being raised in Grassclan than she would in Treeclan. But at least in Treeclan she stood a chance at a normal life. A full, happy life as a clan cat. The fate of Snowpaw's other kits wasn't so sure. Plans were still being arranged that the litter be left in Twolegplace once they were old enough. Snowpaw was glad she could ensure one kit would get to live the life they deserved. But, she was even happier to know that she could finally feel at ease loving her other children. *No matter what happens with them, at least I won't feel guilty whenever I look at their faces*, Snowpaw reasoned with herself. She could love her litter fully now. And she would. Snowpaw swore in that moment that she would do whatever it takes to care for her other kittens. Even if it meant she'd have to make more sacrifices.

Chapter 14

"Someone help me, please!"
The cry rang out not long after the sun had fully risen, startling several cats in camp awake. Snowpaw was among them, having just fallen asleep only a short while before. Her journey from Treeclan's camp had been long; she'd just barely made it home in time to avoid the first of Grassclan's dawn patrols. Yet sleep had never fully come to her. She knew sooner or later she'd hear Jaybird's call of distress. She was anticipating it, and was ready to act the moment it happened. A missing kit was an urget matter that needed immediate attention, after all.
Snowpaw jumped out of her nest, pushing her way past the ivy tendrils that overhung the medicine den. She scurried with a quickness to the nursery, acting as if she didn't know what was going on. A couple of early rising warriors were standing around just outside, confused, but unwilling to check out the scene without prompting. A missing kit was a queen's matter to handle. Warriors usually assumed a missing kit was hiding beneath the wool somewhere. But the way Jaybird had caterwauled gave way for some concern. *And concerned they should be*, Snowpaw thought as she crawled beneath the honeysuckle bush. She put on her best panicked look as she entered, locking her gaze onto her sister. Jaybird was frantically searching every corner of the den. The wool lined floor had nearly been torn to shreds during the effort. Many of the nests had been overturned. And all of the other queens had gone out to seach the camp.

"Flowerlight, help me...! Where is that kit?!" Snowpaw heard Jaybird murmuring to herself as she nosed her way beneath yet another pile of wool. *Praying to the first Den Mother won't help you*, she thought, almost amused by how pathetic her sister was behaving.

"What's going on here? What's all the yowling about?" Snowpaw asked after a heartbeat, fake worry in her mew.

Jaybird turned with a quickness to face her littermate, anxiety clear in her expression. "One of your kits..they've-they've vanished!"

"What...? What do you mean?" Snowpaw made it sound like she was in disbelief. She pinned her ears back, glancing from where her litter laid, then back to her sister. "Which kit is missing!?"

"The-the silver and white one! She was here last night when I went to sleep, I swear she was! She was nestled between the tom and the silver tabby. I remember she had her nose tucked under her sister's chin." Jaybird began to sob, kneading the ground beneath her paws.

"How could this have happened? Where could a five day old kit have gone?" Snowpaw questioned, though she knew perfectly well what the answers were.

"I don't know!" Jaybird wailed. "She's so little. What if someone took her? What if she gets hurt, or killed, or...or....Oh Snow, I'm so sorry!" The frantic queen threw herself at her sister, blubbering into her chest fur. Snowpaw forced herself to cry, a low growl rising in her throat. She allowed Jaybird to believe it was out of anger, anger at her, though in actuality it was a sign of annoyance. Snowpaw loved her sister, yes, but she wasn't the affectionate type. And she certainly wasn't in the mood to be loving towards the cat who was ordered to raise her kits in her place. One day, perhaps, Snowpaw would tell Jaybird what became of the silver and white kitten. But for now, she was content to watch her littermate suffer for the part she had to play in her punishment. *Perhaps this will give Jaybird a taste of the pain I feel, having to watch my babies grow up without me beside them.*

"Jay, this is no time for crying, we must find her," Snowpaw reasoned, though she knew the search was futile. Jaybird took a couple paces back, nodding and turning tail to search in another corner.
Snowpaw's remaining kittens watched the scene from their nest. The three of them must have just opened their eyes. Snowpaw padded up to them, grooming each on their head with a loving purr.

"Hello, my loves," she whispered, heart swelling. "I am your mother.

I am so happy to see you." She felt over the moon, being the first sight her babies would ever behold. Each kitten had rich blue eyes like that of a fresh puddle of water. Snowpaw could stare into them all day and never feel the urge to look away. Unfortunately, she did not have that luxury.

"Let's join the other queens in searching the camp," Jaybird suggested.

"No," Snowpaw growled, turning. "*I* will join them. *You* will stay here and look after the remaining kits."
Jaybird parted her jaws as if ready to argue but bit back her words. She dipped her head submissively before dragging herself to her nest. She curled her silver tabby body around the three fluffy kittens, drawing them towards her belly. She didn't seem to notice they had opened their eyes, too caught up in her grief. Their heads turned in her direction, confusion and concern gracing their fresh little features. *So young yet already so knowledgeable. They understand something is wrong*, Snowpaw realized. *They get that insight from me.*
After hesitating another heartbeat, Snowpaw took off, back out into the clearing. By the elder's den she spotted Mallowlight interrogating the elders, hounding them to remember if they'd seen the five day old kit around. Lilacbreeze and Ashwhisker were nearby, peering through the Leafbare-thin branches of the bramble barrier, trying to see if the missing kit had somehow crawled in there.
Closest to Snowpaw was Posytail, who's nose trailed along the ground, searching for forgien scents.

"Have you found anything?" She decided to ask. The Den Mother stood upright to look the medicine cat in the eye, annoyance plastered on her muzzle.

"If I had, don't you think I would have alerted someone by now?"

"Like, perhaps, the kit's mother?" Snowpaw inquiried.

Posytail growled. "As far as I'm concerned those kits have no mother. By rights, they are kittypets."

"Then why waste your time looking for my lost kit at all?" Snowpaw

flared her nostrils in distate.

Posytail stared at her intently for a moment before speaking. Her voice was stern, but laced with the softness of an experienced mother. "Because leaving a helpless kit to fend for themself is cruel. And even if I did not feel that way, I am bound by the Warrior Code and the Queen's Code to ensure no harm comes to any kitten- clanborn, foreign, or forbidden."

Snowpaw supposed she should feel grateful for that. Though Posytail was acting rude, she was still a good cat deep down. She had a profound love for little ones, and an even deeper respect for the laws of the Land's Star. Mad at them she may be, Snowpaw was still thankful to Starclan for setting the rules in place that protected the helpless. No such mercy would have been found living as a rouge, or back in the Twolegplace. Kits were taken, killed, or discarded despite the will of the birthing parent. Clan life was so much better in compare. And though Grassclan was now treating her cruelly, Snowpaw was still happier to be here than anywhere else.

Unwilling to converse with the Den Mother any longer, Snowpaw took herself to another part of camp. She sniffed at the groud in a futile attempt to locate her "lost" kitten. Any other parent would have been thrown sympathies left and right by passerby clanmates. But as Snowpaw wandered the camp, all she received were harsh whispers and glares. She knew no cat was saddened by her loss. Except perhaps her sister. But the rest of the clan would be happier not wasting their time looking for a forbidden kit. Snowpaw was sure of that. But she was glad to be wasting the warriors' time. They deserved it, for the way they were acting.

Just before sunhigh, the search party returned home. Grassclan had already skowered the camp for traces of the missing kitten and had begun to give up. When Ambereye reported no leads or scent trails, Whitestar finally called off the search. It was a lost cause now. Snowpaw forced herself to act distraught, making herself sob uncontrollably. She had to keep up the mourning mother act to keep suspicion away. She didn't need anyone to wonder if she had a part to play in the kitten's disappearance.

After a while, when everything had settled down again, Snowpaw took herself to Whitestar's den to have a meeting with the clan

leader. As she slipped her way into the crack beneath Tall Stone she took pause, noticing the siamese she-cat already had company. Butterflytail was there, sitting a little too close to the leader to be respectful. And Tigerfang sat nearby, listening into whatever conversation the other two may be having.

"Whitestar, when you're done conversing with the clan's shooting star, may I have a word?" Snowpaw requested, being sure to make all the cats uncomfortable. It was odd for the most popular warrior in the clan to be so close with the leader, especially when she had a mate. Snowpaw wondered if the three of them were planning on creating kits, with the handsome tom as their sire. Something like this was meant to be private. Which was why they must all be having the discussion in the leader's den. Usually it wouldn't be a big deal for the medicine cat to find out about an arrangement like this, though. But being the clan's outcast, Snowpaw was certain Whitestar would not be pleased with her figuring it out.
After sharing a glance with Tigerfang, Whitestar sighed in defeat. She dismissed the two toms, beckoning Snowpaw closer as they left.

"What can I do for you, Snowpaw?"

"I need to get back to my litter," Snowpaw responded bluntly. There was no use dancing around the subject or using flowery words to persuade the leader. "I couldn't be there for their sister. But I can be there for the rest. I want them to know I am. I can't have them growing up, thinking I didn't love them or that I didn't care. Those kits need to be with their mother; now more than ever."

Whitestar stared at the lynx-point molly for a couple of heartbeats. She looked a little surprised by the request. "You know I cannot do that," she finally responded.

Annoyance began to bubble up inside Snowpaw. But she pushed it down, willing her sorrow forward. "You would still keep them from me? After all they've been through? They've just lost their sister for Starclan's sake! How can you keep us apart after all this?"

"Because apprentices are not allowed to have kits. You are not responsible enough yourself to take care of them. What makes you think I'd believe them to be any safer with you than with an

experienced queen like Jaybird?"

"I am a fully grown cat," Snowpaw argued. "I've gone through training. Almost a full year's worth, and I've gained several other years of experience after the fact. Just because I'm being forced to be an apprentice now means nothing."

"It means *everything*, Snowpaw. You are being *punished*. Me reassigning the care of your litter was part of that, as well as for their protection."

"*Protection?* You think my kits are safe, even after one has gone missing?"

"I didn't say that. I merely said my choice to give them to Jaybird to raise was for the sake of their safety. Someone has to watch the little ones as you go through your Warriorpaw training. And while we wait for them to grow, as well. No one could have predicted something like this would occur. Even the most experienced of Den Mothers couldn't explain the strange disappearance of a kitten." Whitestar gave her head a slow shake. She stood up in her nest, looking Snowpaw right in the eyes. "If it would make you feel better, I could assign another of the queens to act as a caregiver for your litter. But you cannot be in the nursery while going through your punishment. That is how our system works. I'm sorry. Truly I am."

"No you're not...you can't even begin to know what sorry is...." Snowpaw growled lowly, turning with a lash of her tail. She stormed out of the den, forcing herself to sob once more. She hated putting on an act like this. But it was the only thing she could do to make herself out to be an the innocent victim. To hopefully get her way. *But it isn't enough,* Snowpaw realized. *I might have to do something more drastic soon...*

Chapter 15

Almost an entire moon passed. The chill of Leafbare began to creep its way into the meadow, forcing Grassclan to prepare for the long season ahead. Goldensong and Snowpaw were working on filling their stores; grabbing all the plants they could before the frost could take them away. Last year had been quite mild, which only warned the medicine cats that this Leafbare would bring with it more of a challenge. Not only that, but a few cats were suspected to have already caught colds. The threat of a greater illness loomed over Grassclan's head. That only served to urge the medicine cats to move faster. Though Collectors often helped the pair gather standard herbs, it was up to the healers to collect their more precious medicines. Only Snowpaw and Goldensong could be trusted to handle things like poppy seeds and catmint. Some herbs were too easy to mistake for more poisonous plants. While others, like catmint, could become something to abuse. They had to be careful.

"Whitestar," Snowpaw heard Chicorynose begin one day, as she passed Tall Stone, "I think it's time we discussed the matter of Snowpaw's kits. Especially since they've grown so much."
Snowpaw paused mid-stride before she walked past the leader's den. She'd just returned from one of many herb gathering trips. Her ears pricked, attention completely drawn to the crack within Tall Stone. For a moment, she forgot about the catmint she was carrying. The conversation taking place in the den beside her was far more important.
"I heard mom mention they're already starting to play in the nursery. Before you know it, they'll be running around the camp."
Immediately, Snowpaw stiffened. She took a quick look around, checking to make sure no one was keeping a close eye on her. Then she hid her herbs under the brambles along the edge of camp. She'd come back for them later, when she was done listening. Afterwards she flopped down beside the Tall Stone in a sunny patch, trying to remain inconspicuous. She groomed a paw, continuing to listen in on the conversation. Though she couldn't see what was going on

inside.

Snowpaw heard Whitestar heave a sigh, the sound of her tail swishing against the earth clear. "You're right…"
By the tone in Whitestar's voice, it sounded as if the decision of where Snowpaw's kits would end up was burdensome. Just another difficult task placed onto the busy shoulders of the clan leader. As if the decision didn't bear any weight on Snowpaw and the kits themselves.

"Have you given it any thought?" Chicorynose asked.

Whitestar hummed in reply. "We should keep these kits. Starclan knows we'll need them. I fear this Leafbare will be harsh. Some of our warriors are beginning to fall ill. We could very well lose a few of them this year. I want to be sure we have cats to fill their paw prints in case the worst should occur." Hearing Whitestar's choice lifted Snowpaw's spirits immediately. She felt as though she could fly away with the sense of relief that overcame her.
"However, I want to consult with Treeclan on the matter, since this concerns them too. The kits share their blood after all."
But just as quickly as Snowpaw began to fly, her spirit crashed back down upon the earth and into a pool of dread. *Whitestar is going to tell Treeclan!?*

"Treeclan surely won't be pleased," Chicorynose commented.
Snowpaw couldn't agree more. They would be furious to learn that Wolfheart's forbidden kits were living among the Land's Star. In an enemy clan no less. Treeclan were notorious for their strong kinships. To learn that some of their blood was being kept a secret in Grassclan would certainly cause a fight. Treeclan may want to claim the kits as their own, despite what the Warrior Code commanded. Kits were to remain in their birthing parent's clan. But forbidden kits were an entirely different matter. They were born in disregard of the Codes. Surely this would mean their fate could be decided beyond the law as well. Snowpaw's body began to quake. She couldn't have an enemy clan taking her litter away, especially after Whitestar had said she wanted to keep them. Snowpaw had already given up one daughter to Treeclan. To lose the rest of them would be torture.
Without thinking, Snowpaw leaped to her paws, rushing around the

back of Tall Stone and into Whitestar's den. Whitestar and Chicorynose stared at her, confused by her sudden intrusion.

"Please don't let Treeclan take my kits away!" She begged. She almost wanted to cry with how desperate she felt at that moment.

"What are you doing in here?" Chicorynose growled, bristling. "Were you eavesdropping!?"

Snowpaw hadn't realized she'd come into the den without a plan. She had no good excuse to explain how she knew the choice Whitestar had made. Still, she tried to find one.
"I was passing by. And I overheard you mention telling Treeclan about my kits. But we all know how Treeclan are. They'll want to take my litter to raise for themselves. You can't let them!" She turned to look at Whitestar. "You won't let them. Will you…?"

Whitestar stared back at Snowpaw for a few heartbeats, her tail swaying thoughtfully. "No," she decided, "if I can help it, I will do everything in my power to convince Treeclan that the kits belong with us in Grassclan. But if Blazestar threatens war over it, I may just have to yield."

"Do you think he would?" Snowpaw wondered.

"It wouldn't surprise me," Chicorynose snorted, licking down her ruffled shoulder fur.

"Then let me come with you to speak with him," Snowpaw requested. "I am the kit's mother. And a medicine cat. Perhaps I can help convince Treeclan to consider otherwise."

Chicorynose glanced at her sister, a skeptical look on her face. "I don't know if that's such a good idea…"

"Please Whitestar," Snowfrost begged her leader, "let me come with."

Whitestar sighed, hanging her head for a heartbeat. "...I'll allow it. I'm not so cruel as to decide the fate of a mother's kits without her knowing what will become of them. But you may not speak during the meeting. Not one word. Treeclan shall be cross with us as it is.

We don't need them lashing out because the cat guilty of causing this predicament has spoken out of turn. Especially with that short tempered tom at the helm."

"Besides, your presence alone might be enough to persuade Blazestar that the kits belong in Grassclan. Especially with how pathetic you're making yourself out to be," Chicorynose chimed.

Pathetic?! Snowpaw was angered by the deputy's remark. She may not be acting as dignified as she normally would. But using such a strong word to define her was insulting. Still, Snowpaw had to admit that Chicorynose had a point.

"I agree to these terms," Snowpaw responded, resisting the urge to grit her teeth.

"Great," Chicorynose mewed, sounding almost sarcastic. Then she turned to Whitestar. "Who else would you like to bring?"

"Redwhisker should be with us," Whitestar chose. "Posytail as well. Their presence will be required. And I would like you to stay behind to take charge of the camp."

"I'll go gather them up," responded Chicorynose.

Then Whitestar added; "And take Snowpaw out with you. She'll be able to help Goldensong prepare some traveling herbs."

"Yes, Whitestar." Chicorynose dipped her head. Then she turned, prompting Snowpaw to follow.
The two she-cats made their way over to the medicine den. As they entered they could see Goldensong searching through the medicine stores. She was busy mumbling to herself, deciding which herbs needed replenishment. After a couple of heartbeats Chicorynose cleared her throat, grabbing the young medicine cat's attention.

Goldensong trilled in confusion then turned to look at her guests. "What's all this about?" she asked. "Is Snowpaw in trouble?"

"Not at all," Chicorynose assured, "but I've come to inform you that Whitestar's requested her assistance. They'll be leaving for Treeclan shortly, along with Redwhisker and Posytail."

Goldensong did not seem pleased hearing the news. "You know this is our busiest time of year. Snowpaw has a lot to handle right now. She hasn't even gotten the catmint stocked yet. We can't afford any distractions. Does she really have to go?"

Chicorynose nodded. "It's Whitestar's orders."

Goldensong let out a hum; a mixture of a thoughtful yet agitated noise. "Alright. But please don't be gone for more than a day. I really need Snowpaw here."

"They'll be back just after sundown," Chicorynose promised. "Would you be able to make a few sets of traveling herbs?"

"That's four more bundles of herbs we'll need to replenish but...sure." Goldensong agreed reluctantly. "Snowpaw, why don't you go eat, and then we'll put the herbs together?"

"Alright." Snowpaw nodded, heading to the fresh-kill pile after receiving her instructions.

"Thank you, I promise this is for a good cause," she caught Chicorynose telling Goldensong. But that part of their conversation only served to fill the lynx-point molly with dread.
Snowpaw could hardly eat the mouse she had chosen from the fresh-kill pile as worried thoughts swirled through her head. She couldn't stop considering the possible outcomes for the mission. The possibility that things were about to change for the worse. That her kits would be taken, or that Grassclan might end up going to war. So, instead of letting her mind wander any further, Snowpaw stood back up and discarded her meal. She would go put together traveling herbs. Work always managed to keep her thoughts at bay. Snowpaw didn't see why it wouldn't help this time, too.
So she returned to the medicine den, where she found Goldensong sitting with the necessary plants in front of her. She was counting, most likely trying to figure how much they would be losing by making the herb packs. Snowpaw had never seen her apprentice so serious before. Since she had left, it seemed like Goldensong had matured. Though she was still too young and inexperienced, the golden molly was growing up to become a fine medicine cat.
Perhaps I underestimated her a little.

"You're back already?" Goldensong questioned after a moment. Snowpaw said nothing as she made her way over to the younger cat's side. She sat down and began to pick at the herbs, sorting them into piles. "You're nervous about what's going to happen, aren't you?"

"...I don't know," Snowpaw lied, her voice low.

"You don't think they're taking you to face Treeclan for what you've done, do you?" Goldensong tilted her head, one ear lowered in contemplation.

"No. Whitestar is too proud of a leader to allow her clanmates to be handled by outsiders. Besides, I'm already being punished. What more could they want to do to me?"

"What if they decide to give Treeclan your kits..?" Goldensong wondered, although she sounded hesitant. Perhaps even as nervous as Snowpaw would if she'd suggest it aloud.

Snowpaw swayed her tail, forcing the fur on the back of her neck to remain flat. "I hope they won't..." she murmured.
Goldensong sighed a little, bringing herself over to press her flank against Snowpaw's. She then wrapped her tail around her; the way a friend would when comforting another. The gesture was sweet. Snowpaw was flattered that Goldensong would show her such kindness. Despite the treatment she'd given the golden molly--before Snowpaw had left the Land's Star--Goldensong seemed to hold little to no resentment towards her. It was a relief really. It made working together easier; more tolerable.
In no time, the two medicine cats had managed to put together the necessary amount of traveling herbs needed for the journey to Treeclan. Whitestar and her patrol came along not long after to retrieve them, beckoning to Snowpaw with a wave of a tail. Being given the invitation, Snowpaw picked up her bundle of herbs and made her way over to join the rest of the group. She took her medicine in stride, then looked towards her leader waiting for further instruction.

"Thank you for everything, Goldensong. Please refer to Chicorynose if you should need anything while we are away. She will be in

charge," Whitestar mewed to the young golden molly.

"I'm sure everything will be alright, Whitestar, thank you. But please, don't keep Snowpaw away for long." Goldensong sounded as though she was almost pleading. Snowpaw couldn't blame her for being anxious to have her old mentor return. She still remembered the first Leafbare she had been considered the clan's head medicine cat. The responsibility then was far greater than Snowpaw had held previous to that point in her life. It was overwhelming; defending the lives of all of Grassclan from illness by herself. But Goldensong had an advantage most new head medicine cats didn't; she still had her mentor with her. Even if Snowpaw was temporarily considered an apprentice, her wisdom and experience were still priceless. It was something that was not to be treated lightly. And Goldensong seemed to want to take full advantage of the gift she was given.

"I won't. We'll try and bring some herbs back with us on the way home if that can make up for this interruption," swore the clan's leader. Snowpaw clicked her teeth, while Goldensong smiled and nodded agreeingly with the offer. And with that, Whitestar turned her patrol around, leading them out of the bramble tunnel and far across the meadow--where the fate of Snowpaw's kits would finally be decided.

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Snowpaw felt incredibly hesitant as the patrol came to settle at the opposite edge of the Thunder Path. Whitestar was taking a moment to tidy her fur while Redwhisker and Posytail were having a chat. Something about how many monsters were out and about today. But the conversation and going-ons around Snowpaw felt distant in that moment, as her anxiety began to spike. The patrol was only a short distance from Treeclan's camp; mere tree-lengths from letting the enemy clan find out about Snowpaw's kits. Anything could happen now. And Snowpaw wasn't sure if she could handle it. Still, the patrol pressed on.
In their travels, not too far from their destination, a Treeclan border patrol crossed their path. At first the enemy warriors were hostile. But when they noticed who the intruding cats were, they settled, if only slightly.
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"We've come to speak Blazestar," Redwhisker meowed. "Can you take us to him?"

One of the warriors turned to speak to a smaller cat beside them. "Shadepaw, lead these cats back to our camp, then come meet us by the Oceanclan border," requested the dark tabby she-cat. The tortoiseshell apprentice, Shadepaw, nodded in agreement, then stepped away from her clanmates. She wagged her tail, beckoning the Grassclan partol to follow her. Whitestar nodded her head in thanks to the Treeclan warriors before they moved on, into the endless line of trees ahead.
A few more bear-lengths into the forest, the familiar sight of blackthorn bushes came into view. Shadepaw ran up ahead, standing beside the entrance to the camp.

"You can enter by climbing over this," she told the Grassclan patrol with one paw on the old elm tree.

"Thank you," Posytail mewed before leaping up into the branches. Whitestar followed just behind her, then Redwhisker, and finally it was Snowpaw's turn. Snowpaw groaned before she made the jump, her claws scraping against the bark as she almost fell back out of the tree. Whitestar turned to grabbed her by the scruff before she could, lifting her into the branches with little effort. Snowpaw supposed the leader's great size was what made it so easy for her to tug another full grown cat up into a tree. The easiest part came next; leaping down onto the leaf padded floor of the Treeclan camp. Snowpaw took the lead this time, freezing as eyes turned to burn into her upon entry. The rest of her patrol did not seem as bothered by the stares. But perhaps it was because the looks Snowpaw received were full of scorn. She recalled Wolfheart saying that he let his whole clan know of their former relationship. It was obvious that the warriors had not yet forgotten. That, perhaps, would make today's mission a whole lot harder.

"Whitestar?" Blazestar called as he noticed the other leader. He waved a group of his warriors off with a lash of his tail. Then he padded over to the Grassclan patrol with a dip of his head. "Greetings. What brings you all here today?"

Whitestar tipped her head respectfully to Blazestar upon his

approach and then replied; "A private matter. Something that would be better discussed in a secluded area."

"Oh?" Blazestar seemed intrigued. "Will it be something that requires my Code Keeper?"

"It might be beneficial if he was with us, yes," Redwhisker agreed. "And your Den Mother."

Blazestar let out a hum, a sound which portrayed both suspicion and worry. Then he turned, caterwauling out to Cardinaltail who sat by the clan's fresh-kill pile.

The Code Keeper perked up at the sound of his name, jumping to his paws to meet with the leader. "You need me, Blazestar?" He asked.

Blazestar nodded. "Fetch Sweetclaw and meet us by the clearing just outside of camp. There's something Whitestar wishes to discuss with us," the ginger tom requested, voice low. He was trying to keep the rest of the clan from hearing. Snowpaw felt grateful for that. Cardinaltail gave a curt nod then pelted off to the nursery. Blazestar in the meantime began to guide the Grassclan patrol through the dirtplace and out into a clearing within the forest. But before they left, Snowpaw managed to catch sight of a pair of familiar pelts. As Cardinaltail emerged with Sweetclaw from the nursery, a young kit came toddling out after them. She swiped for the Den Mother's tail, getting scooped up by a white and black patched queen before she could grab it. Snowpaw would recognize those cats anywhere. The little one was her kit. And the cat who was holding her was Brightsky, Wolfheart's new mate. At the sight of them, Snowpaw's heart ached. She wished that was her keeping her kit out of trouble. Not that bothersome she-cat that Wolfheart had come to find more appealing.
Snowpaw resisted a growl as the group came to settle in the clearing. Cardinaltail and Sweetclaw sat on either side of Blazestar as the parties began their discussion.

"I'm sure you are aware of the circumstances between two of our cats," Redwhisker began, glancing at Snowpaw and then back to Blazestar. "Last moon, your warrior, Wolfheart, came to Grassclan

seeking to be with his former mate. I presume he told you why?"

"No," Blazestar answered. "Wolfheart simply told us he wished to leave to be with Snowfrost. Nothing more."

Posytail grimaced, exchanging a look with Whitestar. "I suppose, then, you are not aware of what has come from this forbidden relationship?" asked Grassclan's leader.

Blazestar arched a brow. "What has come from it exactly?"

"Kits," Posytail replied bluntly.
Snowpaw wanted to slap her across the muzzle with her claws. "Snowfrost has given birth to kits. Wolfheart's, to be specific."

"How is that any of our concern? Wolfheart has already been punished for not telling Blazestar about his relationship sooner. Why should we care that kits resulted from it?" Cardinaltail asked. From the way he spoke, Snowpaw guessed that Treeclan--or at least its higher ranking members--knew about the litter Wolfheart and Snowpaw had together.

"Because Snowfrost had not finished training her apprentice," Redwhisker responded calmly.

"But wait--didn't Snowfrost leave the kits in Twolegplace?" Sweetclaw questioned.

Whitestar looked confused. "Is that what Wolfheart told you? Snowfrost gave birth to the kits on Grassclan territory. They're being cared for in our nursery as we speak."

Sweetclaw gasped, while Cardinaltail let out a groan. Surely he knew this would make his job harder.

"You've had these kits for how long?" Sweetclaw asked.

"Almost a moon now," Posytail responded. "They're already starting to walk and play."

"Wolfheart told us the kits were in Twolegplace," Blazestar piped. "Did he lie to us?" His attention fell upon Snowpaw, his orange gaze

intimidating. She glanced at Whitestar, wondering if she should say anything. Whitestar nodded slightly in response.

Snowpaw swallowed back the lump that had formed in her throat. "I...I told him they were in Twolegplace. Whitestar hadn't decided if they would be sent there or not. So...I told Wolfheart what I thought the most likely outcome would be. Nobody lied. On my part it was mainly a guess. But as far as Wolfheart knows, that is the truth."

"I see," Blazestar hummed. "None of this explains why you've all come here today, though."

"We are trying to decide what will happen with the kits," Posytail mewed. Snowpaw then heard the Grassclan Den Mother mutter under her breath, "Dense tom."

"What say you, Whitestar?" Blazestar questioned, his judgemental gaze set upon the larger siamese she-cat.

"The kits should stay with us," Whitestar answered. "Grassclan needs more cats. And the kits won't be fit to travel until they've turned two moons old. But by then, should we send them away, it's likely they will have started to form memories of the clan. They will probably make their way back to the Land's Star in the future anyhow."

Blazestar's tail swayed along the dying grass, a thoughtful look decorating his features. "I agree with this decision," he meowed. "Treeclan is in no need of more kits to feed. Our queens have been giving birth late this year. And as always, the litters have been large. Even my own mate has given me four beautiful sons this season. So do with Snowfrost's litter as you see fit. It is no concern of Treeclan's."

Snowpaw's heart began to race, the feeling of relief returning to her once again. But she dare not let it settle. Something in her gut told her there would be consequences to follow Blazestar's choice.

"As you wish, Blazestar. Grassclan thanks you for the generosity. And we ask you not share this information with anyone outside of

this meeting. We want the kits to grow up having normal lives, without warriors glaring at them wherever they turn."

"I understand. We will keep this meeting private," Blazestar meowed with a dip of his head. Whitestar copied the motion, solidifying the agreement.
Snowpaw wanted so badly to be reassured by this; and assured that her troubles would all be over soon. That she would have the life she hoped for, once she finished her Warriorpaw punishment. But no such comfort came, not even as the Grassclan patrol left the forest and made its way back to camp. Only the hate filled glares of her clanmates greeted her at home, awaiting to see her final punishment.